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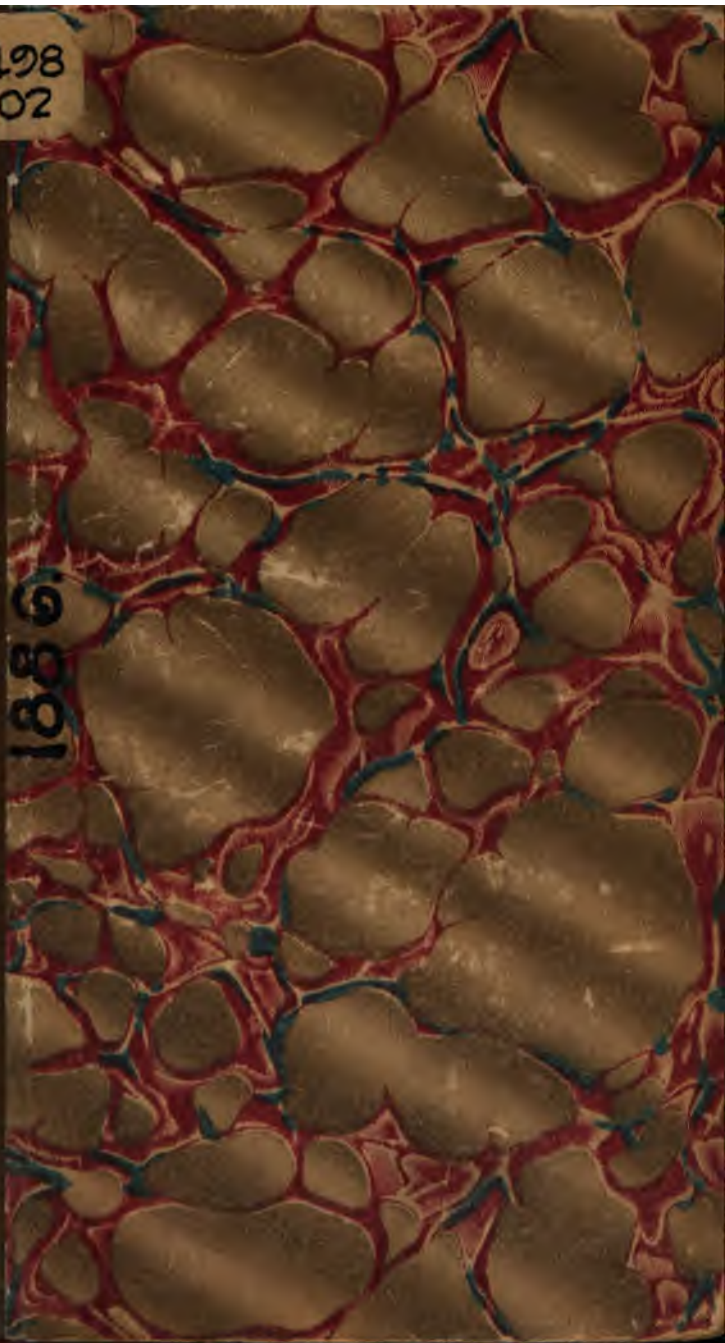
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Morton - Comediettas and Farces.

1886



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Issued Weekly

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SEPTEMBER 24, 1886

Subscription Price
per Year, 52 Numbers, \$15

Entered at the Post-Office at New York, as Second-class Mail Matter

COMEDIETTAS AND FARCES

BY

JOHN MADDISON MORTON

Books you may hold readily in your hand are the most useful, after all
DR. JOHNSON

NEW YORK
HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS

1886

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COMEDIETTAS. AND FARCES.

1819 5.7.183.



JOHN MADDISON MORTON.

PREFACE.

I HAVE been asked to write a few words of Preface to this little book of Plays. I may state that two are original; for the remainder (being too old an offender in this respect to do otherwise), I thankfully admit my indebtedness to French material, claiming, however, for myself, considerable alterations in plot, situations, etc., and complete originality of dialogue.

I beg to call the attention of Amateurs to these pieces—they having been written by me with a special view to Private performance.

JOHN MADDISON MORTON.

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JOHN MADDISON MORTON.

THE present generation is familiar enough with "Box and Cox," that best and brightest of good old English farces, and hundreds of other plays of the same kind, that were written years ago by one of the driest of humorists and most genial of gentlemen; but few young play-goers, I take it, are aware how much the stage owes to John Maddison Morton. Of the form and features of one of the most prolific writers for the stage, I believe many of my own contemporaries to be absolutely ignorant. They know little of his antecedents or history, and yet they, and their fathers before them, have laughed right merrily over the quips and cranks, the quaint turns of expression, the odd freaks of humor that distinguished a writer of fun belonging to the old school. No one has ever filled the place left vacant by John Maddison Morton. Managers for many years past have assumed that the public does not want farces, and are content to tolerate badly-acted rubbish before the play of the evening begins. But a strong reaction is setting in. The pit and gallery are not content any longer to remain open-mouthed while the scenes of the play of the evening are being set, or to be deluded into applauding the silly stuff that is nowadays served up as farce, and in which the principal actors and actresses do not condescend to appear. Why, when I first began to consider myself a regular play-

goer, some five-and-twenty years ago, when I struggled with the young men of my time into the pit, I could see, quite irrespective of the play of the evening, Webster at the Adelphi in "One Touch of Nature," say at seven o'clock in the evening; Toole and Paul Bedford and Selby and Billington and Bob Romer, always in some favorite farce that began or ended the evening's amusement, at the Haymarket; Buckstone, old Rogers, and Chippendale in such plays as "The Rough Diamond," at the Haymarket, with an after-farce for Compton, Howe, and Walter Gordon; and at the Strand such excellent little plays as "Short and Sweet" or the "Fair Encounter," in which we were sure to find Jemmy Rogers and Johnnie Clarke, and most probably Belford, Marie Wilton, Fanny Josepha, and Miss Swanborough. In those days artists were not above their business, which was, and ever should be, to amuse the public; they were not taken up and patronized by society; they did not lecture their audiences, but were modest, hard-working, and unassuming. There were no young fops in the ranks of the dramatic profession with extravagant salaries and diminutive talent, and the young ladies who adopted the profession had to work, and work hard, in order to obtain a name. Farces were then well acted, for the simple reason that the best members of the company played in them. It was worth paying for the pit at half or full price when Robson was set down for "Retained for the Defence" or "Boots at the Swan," and when Leigh Murray, most accomplished of comedians, appeared in "His First Champagne."

John Maddison Morton was born on January 3, 1811, at the lovely Thames-side village of Pangborne, above Reading. His father was the famous dramatist Thomas Morton,

author of "Speed the Plough," "Town and Country," "The Way to get Married," "Secrets worth Knowing," "Cure for the Heartache," "School of Reform," etc. The elder Morton resided at Pangborne for thirty-five years, and only removed to London in 1828. It must have been on the lovely reaches, back-waters, and weirs of the lovely Thames that the future author of "Box and Cox" acquired such a love of angling, and became so enthusiastic and excellent a fisherman. A few years ago I was in the habit of meeting Maddison Morton at the hospitable table of my old friend Robert Reece. They were both members of the old Dramatic Authors' Society, and on committee days Reece would bring the jovial dramatist home to dinner, when, over a glass of old port-wine, and with frequent intervals of snuff-taking, he would delight us with stories of actors, and many adventures with the rod and line. In fact, he told us that he devoted the best part of his after-life to two principal objects, "Fishing and Farce-writing."

But to return to his younger days. He was educated in Paris and Germany from 1817 to 1820. After that he went to school at Islington for a short time, and from 1820 to 1827 we find the future dramatist at Dr. Richardson's celebrated seminary at Clapham. Under the roof of the famous author of the English dictionary he found, and soon took for companions, Julian Young, Charles James Mathews, John Kemble, Henry Kemble, John Liston, Dick Tattersall, young Terry, son of Terry the actor, whose widow subsequently married the lexicographer, Dr. Richardson. In 1832 Maddison Morton was appointed to a clerkship in Chelsea Hospital by Lord John Russell, but he did not appear to relish the desk any more than his subsequent friends,

W. S. Gilbert and Robert Reece. He did not wait patiently for a pension, like Tom Taylor, Anthony Trollope, etc., but got sick of government office-work in 1840, when he resigned his situation.

It was in April, 1835, that Maddison Morton produced his first farce at the little theatre in Tottenham Street destined afterwards to flourish as the Prince of Wales Theatre, and to be the nursery of Robertsonian comedy. The farce was called "My First Fit of the Gout," and the principal parts were played by Wrench, Morris Barrett, and Mrs. Nisbett. As I have said before, Maddison Morton lived in the happy days when farces were popular, when programmes were ample, and when actors were not ashamed of their work. Among the cultivated artists who have played in Maddison Morton's farces are the elder Farren, Liston, Keeley, Buckstone, Wright, Compton, Harley, Robson, Mrs. Glover, Mrs. Stirling, Charles Mathews, and many more of our own day, such as Toole, Howe, etc.

I once asked Maddison Morton some particulars concerning his subsequent career as a dramatist, when he observed, quaintly enough, "My dear boy, it would never do for me to blow my own trumpet. In the first place, I haven't got one, and I am sure I could not blow it if I had." It is sometimes brought as a charge against Maddison Morton that his plays are taken from the French, and as such are devoid of original merit. But how little such as these understand Maddison Morton or his incomparable style. He may have borrowed his plots from France, but what trace of French writing is to be found in the immortal "Box and Cox," or "Woodcock's Little Game?" "Box and Cox" is taken from two French farces, one called "Frisette," and

the other "Une Chambre à Deux Lits," but the writing of the farce as much belongs to the man, and is as distinctly original and personal to him as anything ever said or written by Henry James Byron. For my own poor part, I consider that Maddison Morton is funnier than any writer for the stage in his day. It is the kind of dry, sententious humor that tickles one far more than the extravagances, the puns, and the strained tomfooleries of the modern writer of burlesque—the very burlesque that Maddison Morton considers was the death-blow to the old-fashioned English farce. Players may yet find it profitable to revive the taste for short farces, and they need not hesitate to do so because several excellent and funny plays by the author of "Box and Cox" remain unused. Benjamin Webster told Maddison Morton, not long before his death, that he had made more money by farces than by any other description of drama. This is not difficult to account for. The author was certainly not overpaid; the farces were evidently well acted; it cost next to nothing to produce them, and if successful, the world and his wife went to see them.

Writing to a friend the other day, Maddison Morton observes: "The introduction of 'Burlesque' gave the first 'knock-down blow' to the old-fashioned farce. I hoped against hope that its popularity would return, and that some employment might still be found for my pen. I was disappointed; and as the only means of discharging liabilities which I had in the mean time unavoidably contracted, I was compelled to part with my copyrights, the accumulation of a life's laborious and not unsuccessful work."

It is interesting to note that Maddison Morton's "Box and Cox" was the pioneer of the movement that resulted

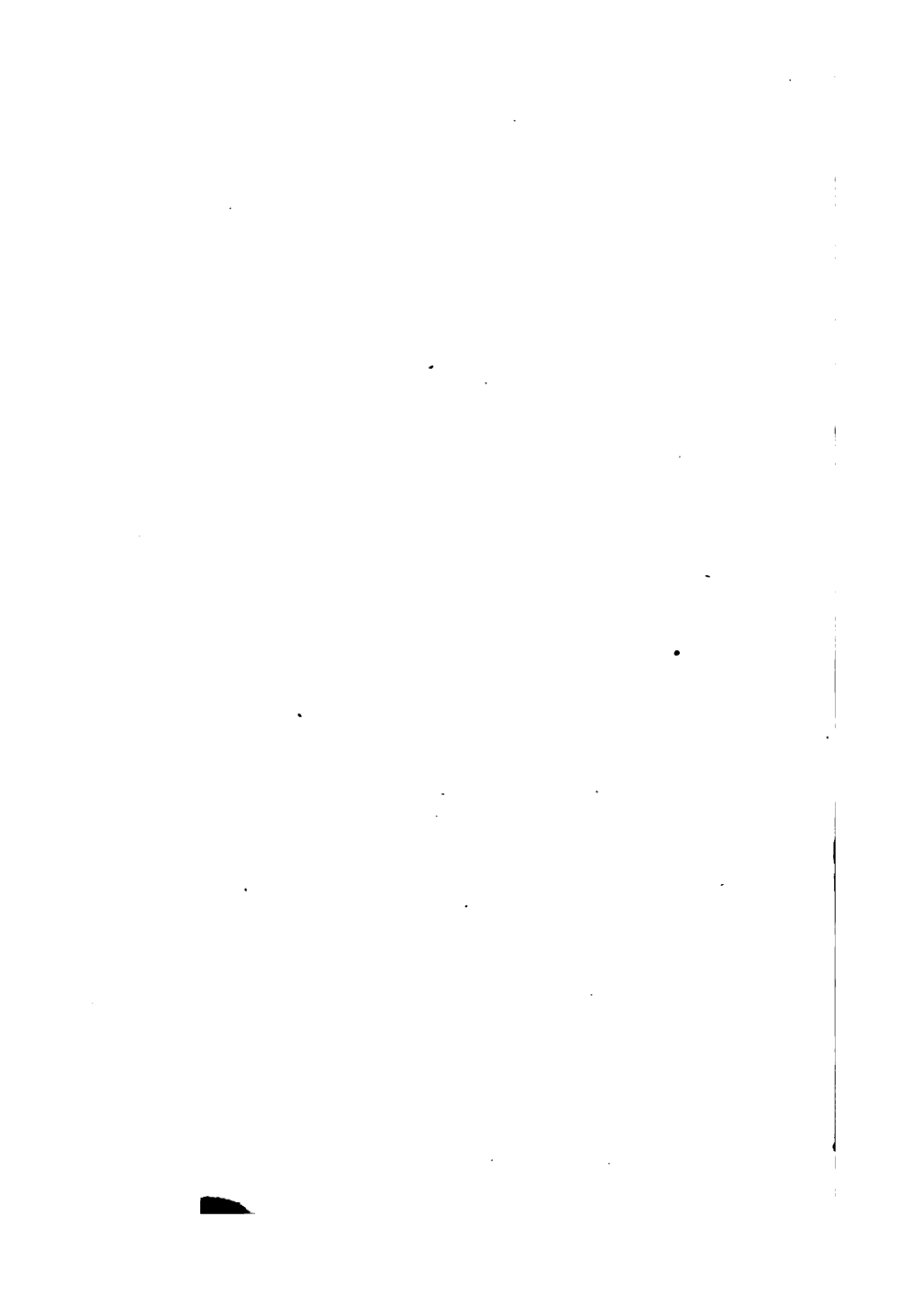
in the literary and musical partnership of Gilbert and Sullivan. If it had not been for Burnand's "Cox and Box," in all probability the "Sorcerer" and the rest of the operas would never have been written. And happily the reign of Maddison Morton is not yet over. On Monday, December 7, 1885, was produced at Toole's Theatre a three-act farce called "Going It," that kept the house in a continual roar of laughter. It is in the old vein, bright, witty, and bristling with verbal quip. When the farce was over the call for "author" was raised, but no one imagined that it would be responded to. To the surprise of all, Mr. Toole led on an elderly gentleman of the old school, prim, neat, well set up, and rosy-cheeked as a winter apple. This was Maddison Morton. At last the young play-goer had seen the author of "Box and Cox."

In the year 1881, on the nomination of her Majesty, this great and accomplished gentleman, who never mixed in Bohemian or literary society, was appointed a "poor brother of the Charter House." Who that has read Thackeray is not familiar with the fine old hospital of "Greyfriars," and its pleasant old "codd's," under whose shadow and in whose society Colonel Newcome breathed his last, and said "Adsum." Here in this pleasant retreat, quiet and retired although in the heart of the busiest part of the city, Maddison Morton met another "brother," John A. Heraud, a dramatist and dramatic critic who had often sat in judgment on Morton's plays. What chats about old times they must have within those venerable walls that circle round the poet-dramatist and the dramatic farce-writer. "Here," writes Maddison Morton, in his well-known cheerful and contented frame of mind, "I shall doubtless spend the short

time I may have to live, and then be laid in the quiet little church-yard at Bow—not, I hope, entirely ‘unwept, unhonored, nor unsung.’”

Good, kindly, gentle heart thus to speak with such fervor and such faith in the long evening of your days! Shut up in your cloistered home, the hearts of those who had the honor and pleasure of knowing you often go out to you! And on the stage the laughter evoked by your fanciful wit, and the true humor that sprung from your merry heart, will soothe you and delight many more who honor your excellent name.

CLEMENT SCOTT.



BOX AND COX.

In One Act.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

JOHN BOX, a Journeyman Printer. JAMES COX, a Journeyman Hatter.

MRS. BOUNCER.

COSTUMES.

BOX.—Small swallow-tailed black coat, short buff waistcoat, light drab trousers, short, turned up at bottom, black stockings, white canvas boots with black tips, cotton neck-cloth, shabby black hat.

COX.—Brown Newmarket coat, long white waistcoat, dark plaid trousers, boots, white hat, black stock.

MRS. BOUNCER.—Colored cotton gown, apron, cap, etc.

EXITS AND ENTRANCES.—R. means *Right*; L., *Left*; R. D., *Right Door*; L. D., *Left Door*; S. E., *Second Entrance*; U. E., *Upper Entrance*; M. D., *Middle Door*; F., *the Flat*; D. F., *Door in Flat*.

RELATIVE POSITIONS.—R. means *Right*; L., *Left*; C., *Centre*; R. C., *Right of Centre*; L. C., *Left of Centre*.

SCENE.—*A room decently furnished. At C. a bed, with curtains closed; at L. C. a door; at L. 3d E. a door; at L. S. E. a chest of drawers; at back, R., a window; at R. 3d E. a door; at R. S. E. a fireplace, with mantle-piece, table, and chairs, and a few common ornaments on chimney-piece. COX, dressed, with the exception of his coat, is looking at himself in a small looking-glass, which is in his hand.*

COX. I've half a mind to register an oath that I'll never have my hair cut again! (*His hair is very short.*) I look as if I had just been cropped for the militia. And I was particularly em-

phatic in my instructions to the hair-dresser only to cut the ends off. He must have thought I meant the other ends! Never mind—I sha'n't meet anybody to care about so early. Eight o'clock, I declare! I haven't a moment to lose. Fate has placed me with the most punctual, particular, and peremptory of hatters, and I must fulfil my destiny. (*Knock at L. D.*) Open locks, whoever knocks!

Enter MRS. BOUNCER, L.

MRS. B. Good-morning, Mr. Cox. I hope you slept comfortably, Mr. Cox?

COX. I can't say I did, Mrs. B. I should feel obliged to you if you could accommodate me with a more protuberant bolster, Mrs. B. The one I've got now seems to me to have about a handful and a half of feathers at each end, and nothing whatever in the middle.

MRS. B. Anything to accommodate you, Mr. Cox.

COX. Thank you. Then perhaps you'll be good enough to hold this glass while I finish my toilet?

MRS. B. Certainly (*holding glass before Cox, who ties his cravat*). Why, I do declare, you've had your hair cut.

COX. Cut! It strikes me I've had it mowed! It's very kind of you to mention it, but I'm sufficiently conscious of the absurdity of my personal appearance already. (*Puts on his coat.*) Now for my hat. (*Puts on his hat, which comes over his eyes.*) That's the effect of having one's hair cut. This hat fitted me quite tight before. Luckily I've got two or three more. (*Goes in at L., and returns with three hats of different shapes, and puts them on, one after the other—all of which are too big for him.*) This is pleasant! Never mind. This one appears to me to wobble about rather less than the others. (*Puts on hat.*) And now I'm off! By-the-bye, Mrs. Bouncer, I wish to call your attention to a fact that has been evident to me for some time past—and that is, that my coals go remarkably fast—

Mrs. B. Lor, Mr. Cox!

Cox. It is not the case only with the coals, Mrs. Bouncer, but I've lately observed a gradual and steady increase of evaporation among my candles, wood, sugar, and lucifer-matches.

Mrs. B. Lor, Mr. Cox! you surely don't suspect me?

Cox. I don't say I do, Mrs. B.; only I wish you distinctly to understand that I don't believe it's the cat.

Mrs. B. Is there anything else you've got to grumble about, sir?

Cox. Grumble! Mrs. Bouncer, do you possess such a thing as a dictionary?

Mrs. B. No, sir.

Cox. Then I'll lend you one; and if you turn to the letter G, you'll find "Grumble, verb neuter—to complain without a cause." Now, that's not my case, Mrs. B.; and now that we are upon the subject, I wish to know how it is that I frequently find my apartment full of smoke?

Mrs. B. Why—I suppose the chimney—

Cox. The chimney doesn't smoke tobacco. I'm speaking of tobacco-smoke, Mrs. B. I hope, Mrs. Bouncer, *you're* not guilty of cheroots or Cubas?

Mrs. B. Not I, indeed, Mr. Cox.

Cox. Nor partial to a pipe?

Mrs. B. No, sir.

Cox. Then, how is it that—

Mrs. B. Why—I suppose—yes—that must be it—

Cox. At present I am entirely of your opinion—because I haven't the most distant particle of an idea what you mean.

Mrs. B. Why, the gentleman who has got the attics is hardly ever without a pipe in his mouth—and there he sits, with his feet upon the mantle-piece—

Cox. The mantle-piece! That strikes me as being a considerable stretch, either of your imagination, Mrs. B., or the gentleman's legs. I presume you mean the fender or the hob.

MRS. B. Sometimes one, sometimes t'other. Well, there he sits for hours, and puffs away into the fireplace.

COX. Ah, then you mean to say that this gentleman's smoke, instead of emulating the example of all other sorts of smoke, and going *up* the chimney, thinks proper to effect a singularity by taking the contrary direction?

MRS. B. Why—

COX. Then, I suppose, the gentleman you are speaking of is the same individual that I invariably meet coming up-stairs when I'm going down, and going down-stairs when I'm coming up!

MRS. B. Why—yes—I—

COX. From the appearance of his outward man, I should unhesitatingly set him down as a gentleman connected with the printing interest.

MRS. B. Yes, sir—and a very respectable young gentleman he is.

COX. Well, good-morning, Mrs. Bouncer.

MRS. B. You'll be back at your usual time, I suppose, sir?

COX. Yes—nine o'clock. You needn't light my fire in future, Mrs. B., I'll do it myself. Don't forget the bolster! (*Going, stops.*) A halfpenny worth of milk, Mrs. Bouncer; and be good enough to let it stand—I wish the cream to accumulate.

[*Exit at L. C.*]

MRS. B. He's gone at last! I declare I was all in a tremble for fear Mr. Box would come in before Mr. Cox went out. Luckily, they've never met yet; and what's more, they're not very likely to do so; for Mr. Box is hard at work at a newspaper office all night, and doesn't come home till the morning, and Mr. Cox is busy making hats all day long, and doesn't come home till night; so that I'm getting double rent for my room, and neither of my lodgers is any the wiser for it. It was a capital idea of mine—that it was! But I haven't an instant to lose. First of all, let me put Mr. Cox's things out of Mr. Box's way. (*She takes the*

three hats, Cox's dressing-gown and slippers, opens door at L. and puts them in, then shuts door and locks it.) Now, then, to put the key where Mr. Cox always finds it. *(Puts the key on the ledge of the door, L.)* I really must beg Mr. Box not to smoke so much. I was so dreadfully puzzled to know what to say when Mr. Cox spoke about it. Now, then, to make the bed; and don't let me forget that what's the head of the bed for Mr. Cox becomes the foot of the bed for Mr. Box—people's tastes do differ so. *(Goes behind the curtains of the bed, and seems to be making it; then appears with a very thin bolster in her hand.)* The idea of Mr. Cox presuming to complain of such a bolster as this! *(She disappears again behind curtains.)*

Box *(without)*. Pooh—pooh! Why don't you keep your own side of the staircase, sir? *(Enters at back, dressed as a printer. Puts his head out at door again, shouting.)* It was as much your fault as mine, sir! I say, sir—it was as much your fault as mine, sir!

Mrs. B. *(emerging from behind the curtains of bed)*. Lor, Mr. Box! what is the matter? .

Box. Mind your own business, Bouncer!

Mrs. B. Dear, dear, Mr. Box! what a temper you are in, to be sure! I declare you're quite pale in the face!

Box. What color would you have a man be who has been setting up long leaders for a daily paper all night?

Mrs. B. But, then, you've all the day to yourself.

Box *(looking significantly at Mrs. BOUNCER)*. So it seems! Far be it from me, Bouncer, to hurry your movements, but I think it right to acquaint you with my immediate intention of divesting myself of my garments, and going to bed.

Mrs. B. Oh, Mr. Box! *(going)*.

Box. Stop! Can you inform me who the individual is that I invariably encounter going down-stairs when I'm coming up, and coming up-stairs when I'm going down?

Mrs. B. *(confused)*. Oh—yes—the gentleman in the attic, sir.

Box. Oh! There's nothing particularly remarkable about him, except his hats. I meet him in all sorts of hats—white hats and black hats—hats with broad brims and hats with narrow brims—hats with naps and hats without naps—in short, I have come to the conclusion that he must be individually and professionally associated with the hatting interest.

Mrs. B. Yes, sir. And, by-the-bye, Mr. Box, he begged me to request of you, as a particular favor, that you would not smoke quite so much.

Box. Did he? Then you may tell the gentle hatter, with my compliments, that if he objects to the effluvia of tobacco, he had better domesticate himself in some adjoining parish.

Mrs. B. Oh, Mr. Box! you surely wouldn't deprive me of a lodger? (*pathetically*).

Box. It would come to precisely the same thing, Bouncer; because if I detect the slightest attempt to put my pipe out, I at once give you warning that I shall give you warning at once.

Mrs. B. Well, Mr. Box—do you want anything more of me?

Box. On the contrary—I've had quite enough of you!

Mrs. B. Well, if ever! What next, I wonder?

[*Goes out at L. C., slamming door after her.*]

Box. It's quite extraordinary, the trouble I always have to get rid of that venerable female! She knows I'm up all night, and yet she seems to set her face against my indulging in a horizontal position by day. Now, let me see—shall I take my nap before I swallow my breakfast, or shall I take my breakfast before I swallow my nap—I mean, shall I swallow my nap before—No; never mind! I've got a rasher of bacon somewhere (*feeling in his pockets*). I've the most distinct and vivid recollection of having purchased a rasher of bacon— Oh, here it is (*produces it, wrapped in paper, and places it on table*); and a penny roll. The next thing is to light the fire. Where are my lucifers? (*Looking on mantle-piece, R., and taking box, opens it.*) Now, 'pon my life, this is too bad of Bouncer—this is, by several degrees, too bad!

I had a whole boxful three days ago, and now there's only one! I'm perfectly aware that she purloins my coals and my candles and my sugar, but I did think—oh, yes, I did think that my lucifers would be sacred! (*Takes candlestick off the mantle-piece, R., in which there is a very small end of candle; looks at it.*) Now I should like to ask any unprejudiced person or persons their opinion touching this candle. In the first place, a candle is an article that I don't require, because I'm only at home in the day-time; and I bought this candle on the first of May—Chimney-sweepers' Day—calculating that it would last me three months, and here's one week not half over, and the candle three parts gone! (*Lights the fire; then takes down a gridiron which is hanging over the fireplace, R.*) Mrs. Bouncer has been using my gridiron! The last article of consumption that I cooked upon it was a pork-chop, and now it is powerfully impregnated with the odor of red herrings! (*Places gridiron on fire, and then with fork lays rasher of bacon on the gridiron.*) How sleepy I am, to be sure! I'd indulge myself with a nap, if there was anybody here to superintend the turning of my bacon. (*Yawning again.*) Perhaps it will turn itself. I must lie down—so, here goes. (*Lies on the bed, closing the curtains round him. After a short pause—*

Enter Cox, hurriedly, L. C.

Cox. Well, wonders will never cease! Conscious of being eleven minutes and a half behind time, I was sneaking into the shop, in a state of considerable excitement, when my venerable employer, with a smile of extreme benevolence on his aged countenance, said to me, "Cox, I sha'n't want you to-day; you can have a holiday." Thoughts of "Gravesend and back—fare, One Shilling," instantly suggested themselves, intermingled with visions of "Greenwich for Fourpence!" Then came the Twopenny Omnibuses, and the Halfpenny boats—in short, I'm quite bewildered! However, I must have my breakfast first—that'll give me time to reflect. I've bought a mutton-chop, so I sha'n't

want any dinner. (*Puts chop on table.*) Good gracious! I've forgot the bread. Holloa! what's this? A roll, I declare! Come, that's lucky! Now, then, to light the fire. Holloa! (*seeing the lucifer-box on table*) who presumes to touch my box of lucifers? Why, it's empty! I left one in it—I'll take my oath I did. Hey-day! Why, the fire *is* lighted! Where's the gridiron? *On the fire*, I declare! And what's that on it? Bacon? Bacon it is! Well, now, 'pon my life, there's a quiet coolness about Mrs. Bouncer's proceedings that's almost amusing. She takes my last lucifer—my coals and my gridiron to cook her breakfast by! No, no—I can't stand this! Come out of that! (*Pokes fork into bacon, and puts it on a plate on the table; then places his chop on the gridiron, which he puts on the fire.*) Now, then, for my breakfast-things. (*Taking key, hung up, L., opens door L. and goes out slamming the door after him with a loud noise.*)

Box (*suddenly showing his head from behind the curtains*). Come in! if it's you, Mrs. Bouncer—you needn't be afraid. I wonder how long I've been asleep? (*Suddenly recollecting.*) Goodness gracious—my bacon! (*Leaps off bed and runs to the fireplace.*) Holloa! what's this? A chop! Whose chop? Mrs. Bouncer's, I'll be bound. She thought to cook her breakfast while I was asleep—with *my* coals, too—and my gridiron! Ha, ha! But where's my bacon? (*Seeing it on table.*) Here it is. Well, 'pon my life, Bouncer's going it! And shall I curb my indignation? shall I falter in my vengeance? No! (*Digs the fork into the chop, opens window, and throws chop out; shuts window again.*) So much for Bouncer's breakfast; and now for my own! (*With the fork he puts the bacon on the gridiron again.*) I may as well lay my breakfast-things. (*Goes to mantle-piece at R., takes key out of one of the ornaments, opens door at R. and exit, slamming door after him.*)

Cox (*putting his head in quickly at L.*). Come in—come in! (*Opens door, L. C. Enters with a small tray, on which are tea-things, etc., which he places on drawers, L., and suddenly recollects.*) Oh,

goodness! my chop! (*running to fireplace*). Holloa—what's that? The bacon again! Oh, pooh! Zounds—confound it—dash it—damn it—I can't stand this! (*Pokes fork into bacon, opens window and flings it out; shuts window again, returns to drawers for tea-things, and encounters Box coming from his cupboard with his tea-things. They walk down c. of stage together.*) Who are you, sir?

Box. If you come to that—who are you?

Cox. What do you want here, sir?

Box. If you come to that—what do you want?

Cox (*aside*). It's the printer! (*Puts tea-things on the drawers.*)

Box (*aside*). It's the hatter! (*Puts tea-things on table.*)

Cox. Go to your attic, sir—

Box. *My* attic, sir? *Your* attic, sir!

Cox. Printer, I shall do you a frightful injury if you don't instantly leave my apartment.

Box. *Your* apartment? You mean *my* apartment, you contemptible hatter, you!

Cox. *Your* apartment? Ha! ha!—come, I like that! Look here, sir. (*Produces a paper out of his pocket.*) Mrs. Bouncer's receipt for the last week's rent, sir—

Box (*produces a paper, and holds it close to Cox's face*). Ditto, sir!

Cox (*suddenly shouting*). Thieves!

Box. Murder!

BOTH. Mrs. Bouncer! (*Each runs to door, L. c., calling.*)

Mrs. BOUNCER runs in at door, L. c.

Mrs. B. What is the matter? (Cox and Box seize Mrs. BOUNCER by the arm and drag her forward.)

Box. Instantly remove that hatter!

Cox. Immediately turn out that printer!

Mrs. B. Well, but, gentlemen—

Cox. Explain! (*Pulling her round to him.*)

Box. Explain! (*Pulling her round to him.*) Whose room is this?

Cox. Yes, woman—whose room is this?

Box. Doesn't it belong to me?

Mrs. B. No!

Cox. There! You hear, sir—it belongs to me!

Mrs. B. No—it belongs to both of you! (*sobbing*).

Cox and Box. Both of us?

Mrs. B. Oh, dear gentlemen, don't be angry—but, you see, this gentleman (*pointing to Box, only being at home in the day-time, and that gentleman (pointing to Cox) at night, I thought I might venture, until my little back second-floor room was ready—*

Box and Cox (*eagerly*). When will your little back second-floor room be ready?

Mrs. B. Why, to-morrow—

Cox. I'll take it!

Box. So will I!

Mrs. B. Excuse me—but if you both take it, you may just as well stop where you are.

Cox and Box. True.

Cox. I spoke first, sir—

Box. With all my heart, sir. The little back second-floor room is yours, sir—now, go—

Cox. Go? Pooh—pooh!

Mrs. B. Now don't quarrel, gentlemen. You see, there used to be a partition here—

Cox and Box. Then put it up!

Mrs. B. Nay, I'll see if I can't get the other room ready this very day. Now *do* keep your tempers. [*Exit L.*

Cox. What a disgusting position! (*walking rapidly round stage*).

Box (*sitting down on chair at one side of table, and following Cox's movements*). Will you allow me to observe, if you

have not had any exercise to-day, you'd better go out and take it.

Cox. I shall not do anything of the sort, sir (*seating himself at the table opposite Box*).

Box. Very well, sir.

Cox. Very well, sir! However, don't let me prevent *you* from going out.

Box. Don't flatter yourself, sir. (*Cox is about to break a piece of the roll off.*) Holloa! that's my roll, sir. (*Snatches it away, puts a pipe in his mouth, lights it with a piece of tinder, and puffs smoke across to Cox.*)

Cox. Holloa! What are you about, sir?

Box. What am I about? I'm about to smoke.

Cox. Wheugh! (*Goes and opens window at Box's back.*)

Box. Holloa! (*Turns round.*) Put down that window, sir!

Cox. Then put your pipe out, sir!

Box. There! (*Puts pipe on table.*)

Cox. There! (*Slams down window and reseats himself.*)

Box. I shall retire to my pillow. (*Goes up, takes off his jacket, then goes towards bed, and sits down upon it, L. C.*)

Cox (*jumps up, goes to bed, and sits down on R. of Box*). I beg your pardon, sir—I cannot allow any one to rumple my bed. (*Both rising.*)

Box. Your bed? Hark ye, sir—can you fight?

Cox. No, sir.

Box. No? Then come on (*sparring at Cox*).

Cox. Sit down, sir, or I'll instantly vociferate "Police!"

Box (*seats himself, Cox does the same*). I say, sir—

Cox. Well, sir?

Box. Although we are doomed to occupy the same room for a few hours longer, I don't see any necessity for our cutting each other's throats, sir.

Cox. Not at all. It's an operation that I should decidedly object to.

Box. And, after all, I've no violent animosity to you, sir.

Cox. Nor have I any rooted antipathy to you, sir.

Box. Besides, it was all Mrs. Bouncer's fault, sir.

Cox. Entirely, sir (*gradually approaching chairs*).

Box. Very well, sir!

Cox. Very well, sir! (*Pause.*)

Box. Take a bit of roll, sir?

Cox. Thank ye, sir (*breaking a bit off. Pause.*)

Box. Do you sing, sir?

Cox. I sometimes join in a chorus.

Box. Then give us a chorus. (*Pause.*) Have you seen the Bosjemans, sir?

Cox. No, sir—my wife wouldn't let me.

Box. Your wife!

Cox. That is—my *intended* wife.

Box. Well, that's the same thing! I congratulate you (*shaking hands*).

Cox (*with a deep sigh*). Thank ye. (*Seeing Box about to get up.*) You needn't disturb yourself, sir. She won't come here.

Box. Oh! I understand. You've got a snug little establishment of your own *here*—on the sly—cunning dog (*nudging Cox*).

Cox (*drawing himself up*). No such thing, sir; I repeat, sir, no such thing, sir; but my wife—I mean, my *intended* wife—happens to be the proprietor of a considerable number of bathing-machines—

Box (*suddenly*). Ha! Where? (*grasping Cox's arm*).

Cox. At a favorite watering-place. How curious you are!

Box. Not at all. Well?

Cox. Consequently, in the bathing season—which luckily is rather a long one—we see but little of each other; but as that is now over, I am daily indulging in the expectation of being blessed with the sight of my beloved (*very seriously*). Are you married?

Box. Me? Why—not exactly!

Cox. Ah—a happy bachelor!

Box. Why—not—precisely!

Cox. Oh! a—widower?

Box. No—not absolutely!

Cox. You'll excuse me, sir—but at present I don't exactly understand how you can help being one of the three.

Box. Not help it?

Cox. No, sir—not you, nor any other man alive!

Box. Ah, that may be—but I'm not alive!

Cox (*pushing back his chair*). You'll excuse me, sir, but I don't like joking upon such subjects.

Box. I'm perfectly serious, sir. I've been defunct for the last three years.

Cox (*shouting*). Will you be quiet, sir?

Box. If you won't believe me, I'll refer you to a very large, numerous, and respectable circle of disconsolate friends.

Cox. My dear sir—my *very* dear sir—if there does exist any ingenious contrivance whereby a man on the eve of committing matrimony can leave this world, and yet stop in it, I shouldn't be sorry to know it.

Box. Oh! then I presume I'm not to set you down as being frantically attached to your intended?

Cox. Why, not exactly; and yet, at present, I'm only aware of one obstacle to doating upon her, and that is, that I can't abide her!

Box. Then there's nothing more easy. Do as I did.

Cox (*eagerly*). I will! What was it?

Box. Drown yourself!

Cox (*shouting again*). Will you be quiet, sir?

Box. Listen to me. Three years ago it was my misfortune to captivate the affections of a still blooming, though somewhat middle-aged widow, at Ramsgate.

Cox (*aside*). Singular enough! Just my case three months ago at Margate.

Box. Well, sir, to escape her importunities, I came to the determination of enlisting into the Blues, or Life-guards.

Cox (*aside*). So did I. How very odd!

Box. But they wouldn't have me—they actually had the effrontery to say that I was too short—

Cox (*aside*). And I wasn't tall enough!

Box. So I was obliged to content myself with a marching regiment—I enlisted!

Cox (*aside*). So did I. Singular coincidence!

Box. I'd no sooner done so than I was sorry for it.

Cox (*aside*). So was I.

Box. My infatuated widow offered to purchase my discharge, on condition that I'd lead her to the altar.

Cox (*aside*). Just my case!

Box. I hesitated—at last I consented.

Cox (*aside*). I consented at once!

Box. Well, sir, the day fixed for the happy ceremony at length drew near—in fact, too near to be pleasant—so I suddenly discovered that I wasn't worthy to possess her, and I told her so; when, instead of being flattered by the compliment, she flew upon me like a tiger of the female gender. I rejoined—when suddenly something whizzed past me, within an inch of my ear, and shivered into a thousand fragments against the mantle-piece—it was the slop-basin. I retaliated with a teacup—we parted, and the next morning I was served with a notice of action for breach of promise.

Cox. Well, sir?

Box. Well, sir, ruin stared me in the face—the action proceeded against me with gigantic strides. I took a desperate resolution; I left my home early one morning, with one suit of clothes on my back, and another tied up in a bundle under my arm. I arrived on the cliffs, opened my bundle, deposited the suit of clothes on the very verge of the precipice, took one look

down into the yawning gulf beneath me, and walked off in the opposite direction.

Cox. Dear me! I think I begin to have some slight perception of your meaning. Ingenious creature! You disappeared—the suit of clothes was found—

Box. Exactly; and in one of the pockets of the coat, or the waistcoat, or the pantaloons—I forget which—there was also found a piece of paper, with these affecting farewell words: “This is thy work, oh, Penelope Ann!”

Cox. Penelope Ann! (*Starts up, takes Box by the arm, and leads him slowly to front of stage.*) Penelope Ann?

Box. Penelope Ann!

Cox. Originally widow of William Wiggins?

Box. Widow of William Wiggins.

Cox. Proprietor of bathing-machines?

Box. Proprietor of bathing-machines!

Cox. At Margate?

Box. And Ramsgate!

Cox. It must be she! And you, sir—you are Box—the lamented, long lost Box!

Box. I am.

Cox. And I was about to marry the interesting creature you so cruelly deceived.

Box. Ha! then you are Cox?

Cox. I am.

Box. I heard of it. I congratulate you—I give you joy! And now I think I'll go and take a stroll (*going*).

Cox. No you don't! (*stopping him*). I'll not lose sight of you till I've restored you to the arms of your intended.

Box. *My* intended? You mean *your* intended.

Cox. No, sir—yours!

Box. How can she be *my* intended, now that I'm drowned?

Cox. You're no such thing, sir! and I prefer presenting you to Penelope Ann.

Box. I've no wish to be introduced to your intended.

Cox. *My* intended? How can that be, sir? You proposed to her first!

Box. What of that, sir? I came to an untimely end, and you popped the question afterwards.

Cox. Very well, sir!

Box. Very well, sir!

Cox. You are much more worthy of her than I am, sir. Permit me, then, to follow the generous impulse of my nature—I give her up to you.

Box. Benevolent being! I wouldn't rob you for the world! (*Going.*) Good-morning, sir!

Cox (*seizing him*). Stop!

Box. Unhand me, hatter! or I shall cast off the lamb and assume the lion!

Cox. Pooh! (*snapping his fingers close to Box's face*).

Box. An insult! to my very face!—under my very nose! (*rubbing it*). You know the consequences, sir—instant satisfaction, sir!

Cox. With all my heart, sir! (*They go to the fireplace, R., and begin ringing bells violently, and pull down bell-pulls.*)

BOTH. Mrs. Bouncer! Mrs. Bouncer!

[*Mrs. BOUNCER runs in, L. C.*]

Mrs. B. What is it, gentlemen?

Box. Pistols for two!

Mrs. B. Yes, sir (*going*).

Cox. Stop! You don't mean to say, thoughtless and imprudent woman, that you keep loaded fire-arms in the house?

Mrs. B. Oh no—they're not loaded.

Cox. Then produce the murderous weapons instantly!

[*Exit Mrs. BOUNCER, L. C.*]

Box. I say, sir!

Cox. Well, sir?

Box. What's your opinion of duelling, sir?

Cox. I think it's a barbarous practice, sir.

Box. So do I, sir. To be sure, I don't so much object to it when the pistols are not loaded.

Cox. No; I dare say that *does* make some difference.

Box. And yet, sir, on the other hand, doesn't it strike you as rather a waste of time for two people to keep firing pistols at each other with nothing in 'em?

Cox. No, sir—not more than any other harmless recreation.

Box. Hark ye! Why do you object to marry Penelope Ann?

Cox. Because, as I've observed already, I can't abide her. You'll be very happy with her.

Box. Happy? Me! With the consciousness that I have deprived *you* of such a treasure? No, no, Cox!

Cox. Don't think of me, Box—I shall be sufficiently rewarded by the knowledge of my Box's happiness.

Box. Don't be absurd, sir!

Cox. Then don't you be ridiculous, sir!

Box. I won't have her!

Cox. I won't have her!

Box. I have it! Suppose we draw lots for the lady—eh, Mr. Cox?

Cox. That's fair enough, Mr. Box.

Box. Or, what say you to dice?

Cox. With all my heart! Dice, by all means (*eagerly*).

Box (*aside*). That's lucky! Mrs. Bouncer's nephew left a pair here yesterday. He sometimes persuades me to have a throw for a trifle, and as he always throws sixes, I suspect they are good ones. (*Goes to the cupboard at R., and brings out the dice-box.*)

Cox (*aside*). I've no objection at all to dice. I lost one pound seventeen and sixpence at last Barnet Races, to a very gentlemanly-looking man who had a most peculiar knack of throwing sixes; I suspected they were loaded, so I gave him another half-crown, and he gave me the dice. (*Takes dice out of his pocket; uses lucifer-box as substitute for dice-box, which is on table.*)

Box. Now, then, sir!

Cox. I'm ready, sir! (*They seat themselves at opposite sides of the table.*) Will you lead off, sir?

Box. As you please, sir. The lowest throw, of course, wins Penelope Ann?

Cox. Of course, sir.

Box. Very well, sir!

Cox. Very well, sir!

Box (*rattling dice and throwing*). Sixes!

Cox. That's not a bad throw of yours, sir. (*Rattling dice—throws.*) Sixes!

Box. That's a pretty good one of yours, sir. (*Throws.*) Sixes!

Cox (*throws*). Sixes!

Box. Sixes!

Cox. Sixes!

Box. Sixes!

Cox. Sixes!

Box. Those are not bad dice of yours, sir.

Cox. Yours seem pretty good ones, sir.

Box. Suppose we change?

Cox. Very well, sir. (*They change dice.*)

Box (*throwing*). Sixes!

Cox. Sixes!

Box. Sixes!

Cox. Sixes!

Box (*flings down the dice*). Pooh! It's perfectly absurd, your going on throwing sixes in this sort of way, sir.

Cox. I shall go on till my luck changes, sir!

Box. Let's try something else. I have it! Suppose we toss for Penelope Ann?

Cox. The very thing I was going to propose! (*They each turn aside and take out a handful of money.*)

Box (*aside, examining money*). Where's my tossing shilling? Here it is (*selecting coin*).

Cox (*aside, examining money*). Where's my lucky sixpence? I've got it!

Box. Now, then, sir—heads win?

Cox. Or tails lose—whichever you prefer.

Box. It's the same to me, sir.

Cox. Very well, sir. Heads, I win—tails, you lose.

Box. Yes—(*suddenly*)—no. Heads win, sir.

Cox. Very well—go on! (*They are standing opposite to each other.*)

Box (*tossing*). Heads!

Cox (*tossing*). Heads!

Box (*tossing*). Heads!

Cox (*tossing*). Heads!

Box. Ain't you rather tired of turning up heads, sir?

Cox. Couldn't you vary the monotony of our proceedings by an occasional tail, sir?

Box (*tossing*). Heads!

Cox (*tossing*). Heads!

Box. Heads? Stop, sir! Will you permit me (*taking Cox's sixpence*). Holloa! your sixpence has got no tail, sir!

Cox (*seizing Box's shilling*). And your shilling has got two heads, sir!

Box. Cheat!

Cox. Swindler! (*They are about to rush upon each other, then retreat to some distance and commence sparring, and striking fiercely at each other.*)

Enter MRS. BOUNCER, L. H. C.

Box and Cox. Is the little back second-floor room ready?

MRS. B. Not quite, gentlemen. I can't find the pistols, but I have brought you a letter—it came by the general post yesterday. I'm sure I don't know how I forgot it, for I put it carefully in my pocket.

Cox. And you've kept it carefully in your pocket ever since?

Mrs. B. Yes, sir. I hope you'll forgive me, sir (*going*). By-the-bye, I paid twopence for it.

Cox. Did you? Then I *do* forgive you. [*Exit Mrs. B. (Looking at letter.)* "Margate." The post-mark decidedly says "Margate."

Box. Oh, doubtless a tender epistle from Penelope Ann.

Cox. Then read it, sir (*handing letter to Box*).

Box. Me, sir?

Cox. Of course. You don't suppose I'm going to read a letter from your intended?

Box. *My* intended! Pooh! It's addressed to you—C, O, X!

Cox. Do you think that's a C? It looks to me like a B.

Box. Nonsense! Fracture the seal!

Cox (*opens letter—starts*). Goodness gracious!

Box (*snatching letter—starts*). Gracious goodness!

Cox (*taking letter again*). "Margate—May the 4th. Sir,—I hasten to convey to you the intelligence of a melancholy accident which has bereft you of your intended wife." He means *your* intended!

Box. No, *yours*! However, it's perfectly immaterial—but she unquestionably was yours.

Cox. How can that be? You proposed to her first!

Box. Yes, but then you— Now don't let us begin again. Go on.

Cox (*resuming letter*). "Poor Mrs. Wiggins went out for a short excursion in a sailing-boat—a sudden and violent squall soon after took place, which it is supposed upset her, as she was found, two days afterwards, keel upward."

Box. Poor woman!

Cox. The boat, sir! (*Reading*). "As her man of business, I immediately proceeded to examine her papers, among which I soon discovered her will, the following extract from which will, I have no doubt, be satisfactory to you: 'I hereby bequeath my entire property to my intended husband.'" Excellent but unhappy creature! (*affected*).

Box. Generous, ill-fated being! (*affected*).

Cox. And to think that I tossed up for such a woman!

Box. When I remember that I staked such a treasure on the hazard of a die!

Cox. I'm sure, Mr. Box, I can't sufficiently thank you for your sympathy.

Box. And I'm sure, Mr. Cox, you couldn't feel more, if she had been your own intended!

Cox. *If* she'd been *my own* intended? She *was* my own intended!

Box. *Your* intended? Come, I like that! Didn't you very properly observe just now, sir, that I proposed to her first?

Cox. To which you very sensibly replied that you'd come to an untimely end.

Box. I deny it!

Cox. I say you have!

Box. The fortune's mine!

Cox. Mine!

Box. I'll have it!

Cox. So will I!

Box. I'll go to law!

Cox. So will I!

Box. Stop—a thought strikes me. Instead of going to law about the property, suppose we divide it.

Cox. Equally?

Box. Equally. I'll take two-thirds.

Cox. That's fair enough—and I'll take three-fourths.

Box. That won't do. Half and half!

Cox. Agreed! There's my hand upon it—

Box. And mine. (*About to shake hands—a Postman's knock heard at street door.*)

Cox. Holloa! Postman again!

Box. Postman yesterday—postman to-day.

Enter MRS. BOUNCER.

MRS. B. Another letter, Mr. Cox—twopence more!

COX. I forgive you again! (*Taking letter.*) Another trifle from Margate. (*Opens the letter—starts.*) Goodness gracious!

Box (*snatching letter—starts*). Gracious goodness!

Cox (*snatching letter again—reads*). "Happy to inform you—false alarm"—

Box (*overlooking*). "Sudden squall—boat upset—Mrs. Wiggins, your intended"—

Cox. "Picked up by a steamboat"—

Box. "Carried into Boulogne"—

Cox. "Returned here this morning"—

Box. "Will start by early train, to-morrow"—

Cox. "And be with you at ten o'clock, exact." (*Both simultaneously pull out their watches.*)

Box. Cox, I congratulate you—

Cox. Box, I give you joy!

Box. I'm sorry that most important business of the Colonial Office will prevent my witnessing the truly happy meeting between you and your intended. Good-morning (*going*).

Cox (*stopping him*). It's obviously for me to retire. Not for worlds would I disturb the rapturous meeting between you and your intended. Good-morning!

Box. You'll excuse me, sir—but our last arrangement was that she was *your* intended.

Cox. No, yours!

Box. Yours!

TOGETHER. Yours! (*Ten o'clock strikes—noise of an omnibus.*)

Box. Ha! what's that? A cab's drawn up at the door! (*Running to window.*) No—it's a twopenny omnibus!

Box (*leaning over Cox's shoulder*). A lady's got out—

Box. There's no mistaking that majestic person—it's Penelope Ann!

Cox. Your intended!

Box. Yours!

Cox. Yours! (*Both run to door, L. C., and eagerly listen.*)

Box. Hark—she's coming up-stairs!

Cox. Shut the door! (*They slam the door, and both lean up against it with their backs.*)

Mrs. B. (*without, and knocking*). Mr. Cox! Mr. Cox!

Cox (*shouting*). I've just stepped out!

Box. So have I!

Mrs. B. Mr. Cox! (*Pushing at the door—Cox and Box redouble their efforts to keep their door shut.*) Open the door! It's only me—Mrs. Bouncer!

Cox. Only you? Then where's the lady?

Mrs. B. Gone!

Cox. Upon your honor?

Box. As a gentleman?

Mrs. B. Yes, and she's left a note for Mr. Cox.

Cox. Give it to me!

Mrs. B. Then open the door!

Cox. Put it under! (*Letter is put under the door; Cox picks up the letter and opens it.*) Goodness gracious!

Box (*snatching letter*). Gracious goodness! (*Cox snatches the letter and runs forward, followed by Box.*)

Cox (*reading*). "Dear Mr. Cox, pardon my candor"—

Box (*looking over and reading*). "But being convinced that our feelings, like our ages, do not reciprocate"—

Cox. "I hasten to apprise you of my immediate union"—

Box. "With Mr. Knox."

Cox. Huzza!

Box. Three cheers for Knox! Ha, ha, ha! (*Tosses the letter in the air, and begins dancing. Cox does the same.*)

Mrs. B. (*putting her head in at door*). The little second floor-back room is quite ready!

Cox. I don't want it!

Box. No more do I!

Cox. What shall part us?

Box. What shall tear us asunder?

Cox. Box!

Box. Cox! (*About to embrace—Box stops, seizes Cox's hand, and looks eagerly in his face.*) You'll excuse the apparent insanity of the remark, but the more I gaze on your features, the more I'm convinced that you're my long lost brother.

Cox. The very observation I was going to make to you!

Box. Ah—tell me—in mercy tell me—have you such a thing as a strawberry mark on your left arm?

Cox. No!

Box. Then it is he! (*They rush into each other's arms.*)

Cox. Of course we stop where we are!

Box. Of course!

Cox. For, between you and me, I'm rather partial to this house.

Box. So am I—I begin to feel quite at home in it.

Cox. Everything so clean and comfortable—

Box. And I'm sure the mistress of it, from what I have seen of her, is very anxious to please.

Cox. So she is; and I vote, Box, that we stick by her.

Box. Agreed! There's my hand upon it—join but yours—agree that the house is big enough to hold us both, then Box—

Cox. And Cox—

BOTH. Are satisfied!

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

FIRST COME, FIRST SERVED.

Comedietta, in One Act.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

COLONEL CHALLENGER.	{	MRS. TEMPLETON.	} (her	
HARRY BARTON.		JULIA TEMPLETON.		nieces.)
BASIL ROYSTON.		JOSEPHINE TEMPLETON.		

SCENE.—Mrs. Templeton's Villa at Roehampton.

Handsomely furnished apartments; large French window at C. looking on a garden. Doors R. H. and L. H. At R. H. a table, on which is an open album; at L. C. another table covered with papers, etc.; table, sofa, chairs, etc.

Enter MRS. TEMPLETON at C., followed by COLONEL CHALLENGER.

COL. Cousin Martha, you are wrong, wrong, wrong! a thousand times wrong!

MRS. T. Cousin Samuel, I'm right, right, right! *ten* thousand times right!

COL. (*aside*). Obstinate old woman!

MRS. T. (*aside*). Pig-headed old man!

COL. What possible reason can you have for setting your face against Josephine's getting married? It's downright tyranny! Call yourself an aunt, indeed!

MRS. T. My reason is a very simple one. Her elder sister, Julia, must find a husband first.

COL. First come, first served—eh? Really, my dear Martha, I must say that, for a sensible woman, you are by many degrees the most prejudiced, the most self-willed, the most—

MRS. T. Of course I am! But you know very well that when I once *do* make up my mind to anything—

COL. You stick to it like a fly to a "catch-'em-alive-oh."

MRS. T. I don't choose that Julia should suffer what *I* did! *I* had a sister, Dorothy Jane, four years my junior, who married before I did—do you think that was pleasant?—who supplied me with a sprinkling of nephews and nieces before *I* had a husband—do you think *that* was pleasant?—who gave garden-parties, balls, concerts, to which all the world flocked, and surrounded her with flattery, adulation, while *I* was neglected, extinguished, regularly snuffed out. Do you think *that* was pleasant? Well, it is *this* humiliation that I am determined to spare Julia.

COL. Well, you didn't lose much by waiting. I'm sure Tom Templeton was as good a creature as ever breathed—didn't live long, poor fellow, but cut up remarkably well considering.

MRS. T. Leaving his two nieces, his brother's children, to my charge, with ten thousand pounds each.

COL. As a wedding portion, which, I must say, you didn't seem in a hurry to part with.

MRS. T. You know my conditions. You have only to find a husband for Julia.

COL. I? When she refused half the good-looking fellows within ten miles round! If she *does* mean to marry, she takes her time about it, that I will say; it never seems to occur to her that she's keeping her poor sister out in the cold!

MRS. T. You may be mistaken, cousin. I spoke to Julia only yesterday, and she expressed herself in terms which convinced me that, were she to receive a suitable offer—

COL. She'd accept it? Well, I'm glad she's coming to her senses at last; and I shall go away all the more comfortable in my mind.

MRS. T. Go away?

COL. Yes. I'm off back again to Cheltenham. Touch of gout

—liver queer; besides, my work here is done. Your husband's affairs, which I confess appeared to me at first sight to be in a state of hopeless confusion, are now clearly and satisfactorily arranged, thanks to my young colleague, Harry Barton, who, I must say, worked like a nigger over them. By-the-bye, he's another victim to Miss Julia's caprice and fastidiousness—she actually snubbed the poor fellow before she'd time even to look at him, much less know him.

Mrs. T. Well, you'll confess he bears his disappointment with becoming resignation (*satirically*).

Col. Yes, he's getting used to it, like the eels. He doesn't see the use of crying over spilt milk. By-the-bye, there's another matter of five thousand pounds coming to the girls out of the Hampshire property. But Barton will give you all the particulars.

Mrs. T. I'm sure, cousin, I feel deeply indebted to you.

Col. Not half as much as you *ought* to feel to Harry Barton. Hasn't he been here twice a week for the last month, up to his elbows in leases, loans, mortgages, and the deuce knows what? Oh! here he comes.

Enter HARRY BARTON at C., a roll of papers under his arm, a lawyer's blue bag in his hand, which he deposits on chair.

BART. (*bowing to Mrs. Templeton*). Your servant, madam. (*To Colonel*.) Ah! my dear colonel, I hope you're well. But perhaps I ought to apologize for entering unannounced. You may be engaged?

Mrs. T. Not at all. I am aware, Mr. Barton, how deeply I am in your debt; but now that the business which served as your first introduction here is satisfactorily concluded, pray remember my house is open to you as before (*Barton bows*). You will kindly excuse me now—a few orders to give (*courtesies and exit L. H.; at the same moment the door at R. H. slowly opens and Josephine peeps in*).

JOSEPHINE. Is the coast clear? (*watching* MRS. TEMPLETON *as she goes out*). She's gone at last (*runs in*).

BART. (*meeting her*). Jo, dear Jo (*taking her hand, which he is about to kiss*).

JOSEPHINE. Wait a minute! (*looking after* MRS. TEMPLETON). She's quite disappeared; *now* you may! (*holding out her hand to* BARTON, *who kisses it*). And now (*turning to* COLONEL), you dear, good, kind old uncle. Uncle is it, or cousin? I never know which.

COL. Don't you? It's simple enough. Your mother's elder brother's second—never mind. Call me uncle.

JOSEPHINE. Well? Have you spoken to Aunt Martha?

BART. Yes. Have you broken the ice?

COL. Cracked it, that's all!

JOSEPHINE. And what was the result? Did she consent or not?

BART. Did she say yes or no?

JOSEPHINE. Why don't you speak? (*impatiently*).

BART. Why don't you say something? (*ditto*).

COL. How the deuce can I, when you won't let me get in a word edgeways? Well, then, my poor young friends, sorry I've no good news for you; the old story over again—Miss Julia stops the way.

BART. And yet Mrs. Templeton's pressing invitation to me to visit at her house—

COL. Is easily explained. She doesn't even suspect that your affections have been transferred from her elder to her younger niece.

JOSEPHINE. Then you should have told her—then there would have been an explosion!

COL. Yes, which would have blown Master Harry clean out of the street door! No, no! don't despair; Julia will find a husband—sooner or later!

JOSEPHINE. Sooner or later? But what am I to do in the mean time?

BART. Yes! what are *we* to do in the mean time?

JOSEPHINE. I'm sure she's had plenty of offers; but one was too young—another was too old—one was too rich—another wasn't rich enough; even poor Harry here, though he followed her about like her shadow, and I'm sure made himself sufficiently ridiculous—even *he* wasn't good enough for her ladyship! It's downright absurd being so particular. I'm sure *I* wasn't!

BART. No, dear Jo! *you* took pity on me at once.

JOSEPHINE. No, not *quite* at once. I didn't *jump* at you. But what—what is to be done?

COL. Have patience!

JOSEPHINE. Patience? *Haven't* I been patient for the last five weeks?

BART. Five weeks and three days!

JOSEPHINE. Five weeks and three days! (*suddenly*). Oh! such an idea! such a capital notion! Listen. Julia must find a husband, or a husband must be found for Julia—that's a settled point.

COL. } (*together*). Quite so!

BART. }

JOSEPHINE. Well, then, as she sets her face against a *young* one—

COL. Yes; as she sets her face against a young one—

JOSEPHINE. And turns up her nose at a handsome one—

COL. And turns up her nose at a handsome one—

JOSEPHINE. She might find *you* more to her taste! (*to COLONEL*).

COL. She might find me more to her— (*Seeing JOSEPHINE laughing*.) So, Miss Saucy one, you're poking fun at me, are you? Then you'll be good enough to find another victim—I mean another admirer, for Miss Julia! Egad, I must make haste and pack up, or I shall lose my train! Come along with me, little one! Good-by, Barton! Keep up your spirits! Recollect you've still got *me*!

JOSEPHINE. And *me*, Harry. Not yet, but you *will*!

[*Exeunt* COLONEL and JOSEPHINE at door R. H.

BART. Dear Josephine! What a contrast to her cold, insensible, apathetic sister! I, who loved her so sincerely, so devotedly, made such a thorough spooney of myself! and was even weak enough to believe I was not quite indifferent to her! I confess I felt hurt—considerably hurt—infernally hurt; but if she flattered herself I should be inconsolable, she never was more mistaken in her life! She little dreamt how soon I should find a cure for my infatuation in the charms of her angelic sister! Dear Josephine! And to think there's no hope of my calling her mine till we find somebody to call her sister *his*! By-the-by, here are a few papers I must look over (*seating himself at table and opening papers*).

ROYS. (*heard without*). Very well; take my card to Mrs. Templeton. I'll wait. I'm in no hurry.

BART. Heyday! who have we here?

[*Enter* BASIL ROYSTON at C.

ROYS. (*coming down—seeing* BARTON). I beg pardon, sir!

BART. (*rising*). Sir—I—

ROYS. Be seated, I beg.

BART. Not till you set me the example (*pointing to chair—they seat themselves*).

ROYS. Like me, sir, you are doubtless waiting to see Mrs. Templeton?

BART. No, sir.

ROYS. Oh! One of the family, perhaps? Possibly a friend?

BART. Yes, sir, a friend. (*Aside.*) He's very inquisitive!

ROYS. (*looking at album*). What charming water-colors—perfect gems!

BART. They are the work of Mrs. Templeton's elder niece. Are *you* an artist?

ROYS. No, merely an amateur. And you?

BART. A humble member of the legal profession.

ROYS. A lawyer—eh? (*Aside.*) By Jove! here's a chance for me! I've half a mind to—he looks the very picture of good-nature, and six and eightpence won't ruin me! (*Aloud.*) Might I venture, sir, on so very slight an acquaintance, to solicit your professional opinion? (BARTON *bows.*) It is rather a delicate subject, a very *peculiar* subject.

BART. I'm all attention, sir, merely observing that the sooner you begin—

ROYS. The sooner I shall have done. Exactly. Then I'll come to the point at once. I would ask you whether, in your opinion, a promise of marriage, written under *certain circumstances* and under *certain conditions*, must necessarily be binding?

BART. Such conditions being—

ROYS. First and foremost—that the lady should have her head altered!

BART. (*astonished*). Have her head altered?

ROYS. I mean, have her hair dyed!

BART. Which condition the lady has not complied with?

ROYS. No, sir! It's as red as ever!

BART. Then, sir, I've no hesitation in saying that the promise falls to the ground.

ROYS. Thank you, sir (*seizing BARTON's hand and shaking it—aside and sighing*). Poor Sophia!

BART. May I inquire the name of my *new* client? (*smiling*).

ROYS. Royston.

BART. The Roystons of Banbury?

ROYS. Yes, Banbury—where the cakes come from.

BART. I was aware that Mrs. Templeton expected you on a matter of business—a certain sum of money, I believe?

ROYS. Yes, coming to the family from some Hampshire property.

BART. I imagined Mr. Royston was a much older person.

ROYS. I see! You mean Jonathan.

BART. Jonathan?

ROYS. Yes, my brother—the head of the firm—he's twenty years my senior! But as he could not spare the time to come, he sent *me*.

BART. (*aside*). It's worth the trial—decidedly worth it! (*looking aside at Royston*). Young, gentlemanly, sufficiently good-looking, good family! Here goes! (*Aloud*.) Excuse my candor, but I think I guess your motive in putting the professional question you did just now. *You* are the writer of the promise of marriage, and you are desirous of contracting *another* alliance—eh?

ROYS. I don't care about it, but Jonathan does! (*Aside, and sighing again*.) Poor Sophia!

BART. Perhaps you have some party in view?

ROYS. No. But I'm on the lookout.

BART. And, no doubt, anxious to succeed?

ROYS. Not particularly—but Jonathan is.

BART. Perhaps that is the object of your visit *here*?

ROYS. Eh? Is there a marriageable young lady here?

BART. Yes.

ROYS. I should like to see her.

BART. Nothing more easy.

ROYS. What age?

BART. Twenty.

ROYS. Any fortune?

BART. Ten thousand.

ROYS. That'd just suit Jonathan! Pretty?

BART. Charming!

ROYS. That'd just suit *me*! Egad, suppose I try my luck? I've half a mind!

BART. Have a *whole* one! I've a notion you'll succeed!

ROYS. But I know nobody here!

BART. I beg your pardon! you know *me*!

ROYS. Eh?

BART. Known me for *years* (*with intention*).

ROYS. (*suddenly seeing BARTON's meaning*). Of course I have!

BART. Ever since we were children!

ROYS. Babies!

BART. We went to the same school together!

ROYS. Of course we did!

BART. At Tunbridge Wells!

ROYS. Yes, at Bagnigge Wells!

BART. And we have been friends ever since!

ROYS. (*enthusiastically*). *Bosom friends*! And you'll really do all you can to serve me?

BART. Of course I will! (*Aside.*) And myself at the same time!

ROYS. A thousand thanks, my dear— By-the-bye, what shall I call you?

BART. Harry. And you?

ROYS. Basil (*grasping BARTON's hand*). Sophia might scratch your eyes out, but Jonathan will bless you.

BART. Hush! (*seeing MRS. TEMPLETON, who enters at L. H.*).

MRS. T. (*to ROYSTON*). Sorry to have kept you waiting, Mr. Royston.

ROYS. I am here, madam, as my brother's representative.

MRS. T. I am aware of it. Mr. Barton, allow me to introduce to you—

BART. No necessity for it, madam. Basil is an old friend of mine.

ROYS. Yes, madam! I little thought of meeting an old school-fellow here (*shaking BARTON's hand warmly*). Some years ago now—eh, Tom?

BART. (*aside to him*). Harry!

ROYS. Harry!

MRS. T. So you were school-fellows—eh?

ROYS. Yes, ma'am, at—Bagnigge Wells.

BART. (*hastily aside to him*). Tunbridge!

ROYS. Of course! Tunbridge!

MRS. T. You must have had some difficulty in recognizing each other?

ROYS. I had—very *considerable* difficulty, I assure you!

BART. We should have met earlier, no doubt, but for my friend's lengthened absence in Italy (*significantly to ROYSTON*).

ROYS. Yes. Ah! charming country—for those who don't mind the cold! (*On a sign from BARTON*.) I mean the heat!

MRS. T. (*aside and looking at ROYSTON*). Really a vastly agreeable young man!

Enter COLONEL at R. H.

COL. So Royston has arrived, has he? (*Seeing BASIL*.) Hey-day! why, this is Basil—his younger brother!

ROYS. At your service, colonel.

MRS. T. You are acquainted, then?

COL. I was intimate with his mother's family—indeed, I may say I was the means of getting him a nomination to the Blue Coat school.

BART. (*aside*). This is deuced awkward!

MRS. T. The Blue Coat school? I thought you said Tunbridge Wells?

ROYS. (*recollecting*). Yes; that was before—I mean after—

COL. (*aside and suspiciously*). I suspect these young fellows are playing some little game of their own; and, what's more, I can pretty well guess what it is!

MRS. T. (*aside to COLONEL*). As Mr. Royston is an entire stranger to me, may I ask you, Cousin Samuel, what is the opinion you have formed of him?

COL. Oh! a very charming young man, indeed! Most respectable family! an ample income already, with great expectations from a couple of aunts and a godmother! A little wild at pres-

ent, perhaps, but he'll soon settle down when he's *married*! Ah! happy the woman who makes a conquest of such a man! (*Aside.*) There! now *I'm* in the conspiracy too!

MRS. T. (*to ROYSTON*). Your friend Mr. Barton does not leave here till to-morrow; you, I hope, will also defer your departure till then?

BART. (*quickly to ROYSTON*). Of course you will! (*To MRS. T.*) Of course he will! (*To ROYSTON.*) You'll be only too delighted! (*To MRS. T.*) He'll be only too delighted!

MRS. T. Ah! here's my niece! (*going up to meet JULIA, who enters at C.*)

ROYS. (*seeing JOSEPHINE, who at the same moment enters at R. H.*). Look! what a charming creature!

BART. No, no! it isn't she! it's the other! Look there! (*pointing to JULIA*). There's a figure! there's a symmetry! Look at those finely-chiselled features!

ROYS. Yes, yes! but still, in my opinion (*looking admiringly at JOSEPHINE*)—

BART. Your opinion, indeed! Pshaw! what do you know about it?

JOSEPHINE (*aside to COLONEL, and pointing to ROYSTON*). What! has Harry found somebody already?

MRS. T. Julia, my dear, allow me to present Mr. Royston, an old friend of Mr. Barton's (*JULIA courtesies stiffly to ROYSTON*).

BART. (*to ROYSTON*). There's a courtesy! that's what I call a courtesy!

ROYS. Yes! but, as I said before, of the two I prefer (*looking at JOSEPHINE*)—

BART. You prefer, indeed! Surely I must know better than you! (*To JULIA.*) My friend Royston, a distinguished amateur of the fine arts, is in raptures with your sketches, Miss Julia. (*JULIA courtesies stiffly again.*)

JOSEPHINE (*to JULIA*). Why don't you thank Mr. Royston, sister?

ROYS. (*aside to BARTON*). Oh! she's the sister—eh?

BART. (*with pretended indifference*). Yes, a little, harmless, insignificant school-girl—

ROYS. Still, I repeat, if I had to choose between them—

BART. Pshaw! my dear fellow, if you only knew what nonsense you're talking! (*Aside.*) Zounds! I hope he isn't going to fall in love with Josephine!

COL. Sorry to interrupt, but my time is precious, and business must be attended to. Mr. Royston, will you step into the dining-room with your papers? Barton, you'll come too?

JOSEPHINE (*hastily aside to BARTON*). I understand it all, Harry. A very nice young man, indeed! and likely to stand a good chance. Don't you think so? Where *did* you pick him up so soon?

BART. Hush! I'll explain everything another time.

[COLONEL and MRS. TEMPLETON *exit* at R. H., followed by BARTON and ROYSTON. ROYSTON stops, turns; and makes a profound bow to JOSEPHINE. BARTON pushes him out.]

JOSEPHINE (*aside*). I wonder what she thinks of him? (*Aloud.*) A very gentlemanly young man, Mr. Royston, don't you think so, Julia?

JULIA (*indifferently*). I scarcely looked at him.

JOSEPHINE (*aside*). That's not very encouraging! (*Aloud.*) How *do* you manage to find so many admirers? I can't!

JULIA (*smiling*). Hitherto, perhaps, I may have had the lion's share of attention, homage, and professed admiration; but *your* turn will come.

JOSEPHINE. It's a long time about it! You are so difficult to please. And poor Mr. Royston, I suppose, will be snubbed like the rest!

JULIA (*reprovingly*). Josephine! surely you don't imagine—

JOSEPHINE. That there is some attraction for him here? Of

course I do! It can't be Aunt Martha—nor I! *I'm only a child!* (with affected humility).

JULIA. Josephine, you speak as though you were piqued, vexed—I might almost say *envious!*

JOSEPHINE. Envious? I? Of what?

JULIA (sighing). Of what, indeed! Ah, dear one, the privileges of an elder sister are not so enviable after all! What is often her lot?—to be constantly exposed to flattery—adulation from the lips of strangers—compelling her to assume an extreme reserve in order to modify the exaggerated and at times indelicate encomiums of relatives and friends. What is the necessary result? Doubt, distrust, suspicion—nay, even prejudice, oftentimes unjust, against those who profess a desire to please! On this impulse *I* have acted—an impulse dictated by self-respect and a due sense of my own dignity!

JOSEPHINE (aside). What a serious tone! (Aloud.) But just think how cruelly, how unjustly you *may* have acted. And I'm sure, as for Mr. Royston—

JULIA. Mr. Royston again! Silly child!

JOSEPHINE. Child? Perhaps I could mention a little fact that—that—but I won't! (Aside.) Good-by to my secret if I did! (Aloud.) Good-by!

JULIA. Are you going to leave me too?

JOSEPHINE. Haven't I got to write out all the invitations for our ball on the 23d?

JULIA. Your birthday?—true.

JOSEPHINE. Yes; that is the *professed* reason—but of course it is on *your* account that it is given.

JULIA (reproachfully). Josephine!

JOSEPHINE. I know a younger sister's duty, Miss Templeton (makes a low courtesy and exit L. H.).

JULIA. Josephine! sister!—Did she but know how she misjudges me! How heavily I have been punished for that pride, that apparent insensibility, with which she reproaches me! Oh,

HARRY! Harry! could you but tell how bitterly I have repented! But surely, surely the cruel, wicked indifference with which I treated his affection, his devotion, cannot have entirely destroyed them—some *little* spark of the old flame must still remain! else why is he so constantly here? Why does he still seem to seek my presence? At any rate, he shall see that I am no heartless coquette; and when this Mr. Royston presents himself, as I'm sure he *will* (*seeing ROYSTON, who enters from R. H.*)— I thought so!

ROYS. (*aside*). She's alone! She's decidedly handsome. Yet, as I said before, there's something about the other that—that— (*Aloud, and bowing to JULIA.*) Miss Templeton!

JULIA (*courtesying*). Sir! the business matter in which you are engaged is, I presume, settled?

ROYS. Yes; the signatures alone are required.

JULIA. In that case perhaps I had better— (*About to retire.*)

ROYS. One moment, I beg! (*Aside.*) She's decidedly *very* handsome! Still—I don't know how it is—but there is certainly something about the other that—that— (*Aloud.*) Before leaving this house to-morrow, with my new acquaintance—I mean *my old friend* Barton—

JULIA (*quickly*). Mr. Barton leaves to-morrow?

ROYS. Yes, alas! I say "alas," because one day only is now left for me to admire your physical attractions, your mental accomplishments—

JULIA. Oh, sir! Believe me, my sister is far more accomplished than I am.

ROYS. Far be it from me to deny it. Still, from the highly eulogistic terms in which every one speaks of you—your sister among the first—

JULIA. Ah, sir! Dear Josephine is so amiable, so affectionate, so good, so loving, so angelic—

ROYS. (*aside*). She sticks up for her sister, that I will say! (*Aloud.*) Still, there are *certain* attractions which we can all judge of by our own eyes.

JULIA (*quickly*). And who can possess them to a greater degree than Josephine? Such exquisite grace—such absolute perfection of form and feature—

ROYS. (*aside*). Her sister again! If we go on at this rate, we sha'n't get on very fast! (*Aloud.*) Allow me to be frank with you; my brother Jonathan—but perhaps you've never heard of Jonathan?—Jonathan Royston, of Banbury—where the cakes come from—well, he often reproaches me with being what he calls rather wild and fast and flighty—

JULIA. The only fault I find with Josephine, dear child. She is so giddy, so thoughtless, so excitable! What a capital match you'd make! Ha, ha, ha!

ROYS. (*aside*). That's a pretty broad hint! (*Aloud.*) And he—I mean Jonathan—says that the best thing I could do would be to get married!

JULIA. The very conclusion I have come to about Josephine.

ROYS. (*aside*). It really looks as if she wanted to turn me over to her sister. (*Aloud.*) And having received the flattering assurance that my pretensions to your hand might possibly not be unsuccessful—

JULIA. From whom, pray? Doubtless from my aunt.

ROYS. Oh no! From my dear old friend, Barton.

JULIA (*indignantly*). Mr. Barton? He? No, no! I cannot, *will* not believe it!

ROYS. I'm sure he will not deny it—and see, fortunately, he's here!

Enter BARTON at door R. H.

BART. Miss Templeton, your presence is required in the drawing-room.

JULIA (*very coldly, and seating herself at table*). Presently.

BART. (*aside to ROYSTON*). Well, what news?

ROYS. (*aside*). All right! At least, if it isn't this one, it'll be the other! One of the two!

BART. What do you mean by "the other?"

ROYS. The "little, harmless, insignificant school-girl," you know!

BART. (*aside*). Confound the fellow!

ROYS. You first put the notion of marriage into my head, and I won't leave this house a bachelor; I'll marry somebody! I leave you together! You'll plead my cause, won't you?—and pitch it strong, won't you? I shall be all anxiety to know the result—because if *she* won't have me, I can fall back on the other. Don't you see? (*shaking BARTON'S hand, and runs out at c.*).

BART. (*aside, and looking at JULIA*). To have to plead the cause of another, when, in spite of me, her presence *will* recall the past, painful, humiliating as it is!

JULIA (*with indifference*). Your friend has left you, Mr. Barton?

BART. He has, *Miss Templeton*; but he has left an advocate to intercede with you on his behalf.

JULIA (*satirically*). A willing and an earnest one, no doubt, who probably has already furnished him with a detailed catalogue of my tastes, habits, pursuits, disposition—

BART. (*aside*). He's been blabbing! (*Aloud.*) Surely he cannot have betrayed my confidence?

JULIA (*with suppressed anger*). The charge of "betrayal of confidence" should rather be levelled at one who by his intimacy with a family, into which he is admitted on terms of friendship, is enabled to study the characters of its members for the purpose of retailing the result of his observations to others!

BART. I will not affect to misunderstand your reproof. It is true that I spoke of you to Mr. Royston in terms which you fully merit—that I even told him your heart was free.

JULIA. Perfectly, absolutely free! You undertook to be his advocate with such zeal, such earnestness, one might almost imagine you had some personal interest.

BART. And what if I *had* an interest—a *powerful* interest?

JULIA (*quickly*). Indeed?

BART. Yes. And after the somewhat harsh rejection I met with at your hands—which, no doubt, I fully merited—what greater proof can I give of the esteem in which I still hold you than to confide my secret to you?

JULIA (*starting*). A secret? (*Aside.*) What can he mean?

BART. That, on the eve of leaving your family, I should feel far less regret could I but indulge in the hope of ever becoming connected with it by a closer tie.

JULIA (*aside, and joyfully*). Can it be? Has he forgotten—forgiven? Can he still care for me? (*Aloud.*) But why this silence—this want of confidence in me?

BART. Frankly, because we feared you would oppose our wishes, our hopes.

JULIA (*eagerly*). Our hopes? We feared?

BART. Yes! She especially.

JULIA. *She?* Of whom are you speaking? Her name?

BART. Surely I must have mentioned it? Your sister.

JULIA (*starting from her chair*). Josephine!

BART. Yes; rejected by her elder sister, I sought and found solace and consolation in her goodness and sympathy.

JULIA (*with increasing anger*). So! Your frequent visits, your constant presence here, apparently so inconsistent with your “wounded feelings” (*satirically*), are now explained! It was for *her*! And I was to be kept in ignorance—to fancy, to believe, to hope—

BART. (*surprised*). Miss Templeton!

JULIA. I now understand this anxiety to dispose of my hand—this crowd of admirers thrown in my way! What mattered *my* feelings—*my* happiness? I was an obstacle to be removed! (*with increasing excitement*).

BART. I implore you—

JULIA (*stamping her foot*). Silence, sir!

Enter MRS. TEMPLETON hurriedly at R. H.

MRS. T. What is the matter here? Julia! what means this excitement—this agitation? Perhaps you, sir (*to BARTON*)—

BART. I am as much surprised as yourself, madam! I ventured to confide to Miss Julia my pretensions to the hand of her sister—

MRS. T. (*with a scream*). What! You had the *cruelty*, the *barbarity* to make such an avowal to her elder sister? (*advancing upon BARTON, who retreats*)—to lacerate her feelings! to wound her pride!

JULIA. Yes, that's it!—to wound my pride!

BART. But really—

MRS. T. Silence, young man! I remember what *my* feelings were when my younger sister was married before me. I was choking, sir! suffocating, sir! I turned positively purple! all sorts of colors, sir! And here is a little pert, forward chit, daring to follow her Aunt Dorothy Jane's example!—but here she comes. (*Enter COLONEL from R. H., and JOSEPHINE from L. H.*) So, miss (*advancing angrily on JOSEPHINE*), a pretty account I've heard of you! To mix yourself up at *your* age in a silly romance—a nonsensical love-intrigue—

COL. (*interfering*). But, my dear Martha—

MRS. T. (*turning sharply on him*). Hold your tongue, Cousin Samuel!

JOSEPHINE. But, aunt, if you'll only allow me—

MRS. T. But I *won't* allow you! (*To JULIA*.) Keep up your spirits, poor persecuted victim!

JOSEPHINE. Victim? It seems to me that *I'm* the victim! Just as I thought I was going to be married and settled! (*beginning to sob*; COLONEL tries to pacify her).

MRS. T. Married and settled, indeed! A child—a baby like you! (*To BARTON*.) After what has occurred, sir, you will see that your further presence under this roof—

BART. (*bowing*). I fully understand, madam!

MRS. T. (*to JOSEPHINE*). Come, miss, follow me! (*JOSEPHINE about to speak.*) Not a word! It is for *me* to speak, as you'll find I intend to do, and to some purpose. This way! (*making JOSEPHINE pass before her; she and JULIA follow her out at R. H.*).

COL. Wheugh! here's a pretty piece of business!

BART. Not satisfied with rejecting me herself, she carries her prejudice, her hate so far as to—

COL. Hate? nonsense! (*Suddenly.*) By Jove! I have it!—at least I think I have. What if she should feel a “sneaking kindness” for you, after all?

BART. Pshaw!

COL. But what about friend Royston?

BART. Hang friend Royston!

COL. With all my heart; but where the deuce is he?

BART. Waiting somewhere or other to hear the result of my interview with Miss Templeton.

COL. In which you undertook to plead his cause—eh?

BART. Yes; and forgot all about it in my anxiety to plead my own!

COL. What's that? Do you mean to say you confided to her the secret between you and Josephine?

BART. Yes; trusting in her generous nature and her sisterly affection, I certainly *did*!

COL. And a pretty mess you've made of it! Well, I must find Royston and let him know. As for you, as you've received orders to march, the sooner you pack up and pack off the better! (*hurries out at C.*).

(*Door at R. H. opens, and JOSEPHINE peeps in.*)

JOSEPHINE. Harry! Are you alone?—quite alone? (*hurries forward*).

BART. Yes. What is it?

JOSEPHINE. Such a discovery! (*in a very mysterious tone*). She's got one!

BART. She? Who?

JOSEPHINE. Julia!

BART. Got one? Got what?

JOSEPHINE. A young man! shut up in a box!

BART. In a box?

JOSEPHINE. Listen. After being well scolded by Aunt Martha, I followed Julia to her room. There she was, with a little open box before her, out of which she took something, looked at it, then pressed her lips to it, and gave such a sigh!—you might have heard it here! perhaps you did?

BART. Well?

JOSEPHINE. Then aunt called her, and she hurried out of the room, leaving the box on the table; and then—then—somehow or other—here it is! (*producing a small casket*). It looks as if there was a young man inside—I mean a portrait—doesn't it?

BART. You've not opened it? (*eagerly*).

JOSEPHINE. No! That's for Aunt Martha to do!

BART. Surely you would not betray your sister's secret—perhaps her happiness?

JOSEPHINE. Much she cared about *mine*, didn't she? Aunt Martha must and shall see it! (*going*; BARTON stops her, the box falls on stage and opens). There! there! how clumsy you are!

BART. (*picks up the box, and then suddenly starting*). What do I see?

JOSEPHINE. That's what I want to know! It is a portrait, isn't it?

BART. (*confused*). Yes!—no! a mere fancy sketch, nothing more! (*taking miniature from box, and hastily concealing it in his breast-pocket*). Be persuaded by me! replace the box where you found it! (*giving box to her*).

JOSEPHINE. Mayn't I take just one little peep?—not that I've an atom of curiosity!

BART. No, no!

JOSEPHINE. Well, if you insist on it.

BART. I do not *insist*, I beg, *implore* of you.

JOSEPHINE. Very well! (*hurries out at R. H.*).

BART. (*watching her out, then taking miniature out and looking at it*). My portrait! and what is written here? (*Reading.*) "From memory." What am I to think? Can I dare to hope that her indifference was assumed—that she ever loved me—that she loves me still? Can such happiness be mine? Dear, dear Julia. But zounds! what about Josephine? Poor little girl! I can't marry them both! What—what is to be done? (*walking up and down*). Will anybody tell me what's to be done?

Enter ROYSTON hurriedly at C.

ROYS. (*coming down*). Oh, here you are! I couldn't wait any longer! (*following BARTON up and down*).

BART. (*impatiently*). Don't worry! don't bother!

ROYS. (*astonished*). Bother! when I want to thank you for introducing me to this charming, amiable family, and to tell you I don't despair of becoming one of it!

BART. What?

ROYS. In a word, I'm in love! There's no mistake about it! Over head and ears in love!

BART. What, sir? you persist in carrying on this absurd, ridiculous joke?

ROYS. Joke?

BART. Yes, sir; I beg to tell you I'll not allow, I'll not permit you to annoy poor dear Julia—I mean Miss Templeton—with your unwelcome attentions, sir—your absurd importunities, sir!

ROYS. Miss Templeton? My dear fellow, she's nothing whatever to do with it! It's the other! the little one!

BART. (*joyfully*). Josephine?

ROYS. Yes.

BART. My dear fellow! Come to my arms! (*throwing his*

arms about ROYSTON, who struggles). I congratulate you! I give you joy! Such a sweet, charming, amiable creature, brimful of talent, overflowing with tenderness. Come to my arms again! (*embracing ROYSTON again*).

ROYS. Then you'll speak for me—eh?

BART. Speak for yourself—here she comes.

Enter JOSEPHINE hurriedly at R.

JOSEPHINE (*stopping on seeing ROYSTON*). Mr. Royston.

BART. (*aside to ROYSTON*). Now, then, speak out! don't be afraid! put on a sentimental look.

ROYS. (*assuming a very lackadaisical look*). This sort of thing! (*Aloud.*) Miss Josephine—I—I— (*Aside.*) It's very awkward! if I only knew how to begin.

BART. (*aside to him*). Go on!

ROYS. Pardon my frankness, but it has been impossible for me to find myself in your charming society without being captivated—enchanted—by your fascinations, your—

JOSEPHINE (*surprised*). I thought it was my sister who—

ROYS. So it was! but she wouldn't have me! that's why I—

BART. (*hastily aside to him*). No! that won't do!

ROYS. (*shouting*). No! that won't do!

JOSEPHINE. (*still more astonished*). And you don't hesitate to address me in this language before— (*pointing to BARTON*).

ROYS. Before my friend—my bosom friend—that I went to school with at Bagnigge Wells? Why should I? It is he who encourages me—who tells me to “go on.” You told me to “go on,” didn't you?

JOSEPHINE (*with intention, and looking at BARTON*). But has it never occurred to you that you might have a rival?

ROYS. So much the better! I should make it my immediate business to sweep him off the face of the earth!

JOSEPHINE (*to BARTON, in a sarcastic tone*). And you, sir! you

can listen with perfect calmness, indifference! Have *you* nothing to say?

ROYS. Yes! Have *you* nothing?—

BART. (*aside to him*). Hold *your* tongue! (*Aloud, and with affected solemnity*.) Ah! who can anticipate events? How little do we know what a few hours may bring forth!

ROYS. Yes! how little do we know!—

BART. (*aside to him again*). Hold *your* tongue! (*Aloud*.) In a word, what if circumstances compel me to leave England for a considerable time?

JOSEPHINE. A considerable time?

BART. Yes; for two years at least—possibly more!

JOSEPHINE. Two or three years?

BART. Could I venture to hope that you would submit to such a tax on your goodness—your patience?

JOSEPHINE (*very quickly*). I should think not, indeed!

BART. (*aside*). She doesn't love me! Huzza! (*Aloud*.) What course is, then, open to me? One—only one: to sacrifice myself to the happiness of my friend!

ROYS. (*grasping his hand*). Glorious creature!

JOSEPHINE. But what about your *own* happiness? It isn't likely you could give me up so quietly without some *other* reason—some *other* motive!

BART. I have *another* motive, which for your sister's sake you will respect! In a word, that portrait—

JOSEPHINE. In Julia's box? Yes. Well?

BART. Was *mine*! See! (*taking out portrait and showing it*).

JOSEPHINE (*exclaiming*). Yours? It is!

ROYS. Yours? It is! (*bewildered*).

JOSEPHINE. Then—then *you* are her young man, after all?

ROYS. Yes. You are her young man—

JOSEPHINE. Of course; now I understand. Now I see it all.

ROYS. So do I! No, I don't! At least, not *quite*.

Enter COLONEL hurriedly at c.

COL. (*singing as he comes in*). "See, the conquering hero comes." Victory! victory! Everything's settled; and now, my dear young friends (*shaking BARTON's and JOSEPHINE's hands*), you can get married as soon as you like.

JOSEPHINE.

BART. } (*together*). Married?

ROYs.

COL. Yes! I had a devil of a fight for it, but I've carried the day! Aunt Martha consents, Julia consents, everybody consents!

ROYs. I beg your pardon! I don't! (*Shouting*). I forbid the banns!

Enter MRS. TEMPLETON, followed by JULIA, at R. H.

JULIA (*aside, as she sees BARTON*). Still here!

JOSEPHINE. So, Aunt Martha, you've given your consent? And you, too, Julia?

JULIA (*endeavoring to conceal her emotion*). Yes, Josephine, willingly, gladly! Can I be indifferent to your happiness? (*smiling sadly*).

JOSEPHINE (*aside*). How bravely she bears herself! (*Aloud*.) And yet, just now, you were so indignant, so angry with me?

JULIA. A momentary caprice, an unworthy jealousy!—but no more of that. Kiss me, dear sister! (*kissing JOSEPHINE and moving away*).

JOSEPHINE (*aside*). A tear? But you won't suffer long, poor dear martyr! (*Suddenly bursting into loud laughter*.) Ha! ha! ha! (*Aside to COLONEL*.) Laugh!

COL. (*forcing laugh*). Ha! ha! ha! (*Aside*.) Laugh!

ROYs. (*very loud*). Ha! ha! ha! (*Aside*.) I don't know what I'm laughing about.

MRS. T. What is the matter?

JOSEPHINE (*laughing again*). Ha! ha! ha! You don't mean to say you've all been taken in? Did you think we were in earnest all the time? Ha! ha! ha! (*Aside to COLONEL.*) Laugh!

COL. Ha! ha! ha!

ROYS. (*very loud*). Ha! ha! ha!

MRS. T. (*impatiently*). Josephine, I insist on your explaining this extraordinary behavior instantly!

JOSEPHINE. Nothing so simple. (*To COLONEL and BARTON.*) There's no necessity for our carrying on this innocent little *jest* any longer, is there?

MRS. T. Jest?

JOSEPHINE. Yes; this harmless conspiracy to make everybody happy! Julia dear, it was to test your love for me that I pretended to be so very anxious to get married, which I wasn't the least little bit in the world (*with a sly look at ROYSTON*). I mean I wasn't *then*! My fellow-conspirator, Mr. Barton, fearing that your rejection of him might proceed from a preference for another, joined in the plot, but very unwillingly, for it is you, Julia, you alone, that he has ever loved; you alone that he loves still!

MRS. T. What is it I hear?

BART. The truth, madam! (*To JULIA.*) May I hope, or must I endure a second refusal!

JULIA (*tenderly*). I suffered too much from the first, Harry (*giving her hand to BARTON*).

ROYS. (*aside*). That's *one* couple; but there's room for another. (*To MRS. TEMPLETON.*) Madam, I have the honor to solicit the hand of your younger niece, Miss Josephine!

MRS. T. With all my heart, Mr. Royston; that is, unless Josephine objects.

JOSEPHINE (*quickly*). But she doesn't! (*giving her hand to ROYSTON*).

BART. You see, Jonathan will be satisfied, after all.

ROYS. Yes. But poor Sophia (*sighing*).

BART. Hush! (*Aside to JULIA, and slipping the portrait into her hand.*) You'll put this portrait back in its place.

JOSEPHINE. She won't care to look at it, now that she's got the *original*.

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

PEPPERPOT'S LITTLE PETS!

In One Act.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

JACK PEPPERPOT, late H. M.
147th Foot.
DOCTOR JACOBUS JOGTROT.
MR. CHRISTOPHER CHIRPER.

STEPHEN BLUNT.
MRS. TARLETAN.
JESSIE (her niece).
MARTHA (a servant).

SCENE.—Mrs. Tarletan's Villa at Hampstead.

Elegantly furnished room at MRS. TARLETAN'S villa. French windows at back showing garden beyond; doors R. H. 3 E. and L.; fireplace at L. H. 2 E.; table, chairs, sofa, etc. MARTHA discovered arranging furniture, etc. (bell heard without).

MARTHA. There's the gate bell beginning. Butcher for orders, I suppose. (*Bell heard again.*) I thought so; he's the most impatient young man I ever came across! Asked me if I'd marry him only yesterday morning when he called for orders, and was quite saucy because I hadn't made up my mind when he brought the meat! I must go and ask missus. (*Exit door R. JACK PEPPERPOT is seen to cross at back beyond the French windows; looks cautiously in at c.*)

JACK. No one to be seen; so much the better. (*Calling off.*) Now then, Blunt, come along! take care how you turn the corner; that'll do. (*Enters at c., walking backward, closely followed by STEPHEN BLUNT, in an undress military jacket and cap, carrying a box covered with Chinese characters.*) Left wheel! halt. (*Takes*

box carefully from BLUNT and places it on small table—opens lid. Nothing broken, I hope. No; I don't even see a chip!

BLUNT. That's a wonder, too, your honor! cups and saucers is rather a delicate sort of cargo to bring all the way from China.

JACK (*looking at watch*). Nine o'clock! I wonder if my dear, excellent old aunt is still indulging in a horizontal position? We reached town so late last night, I was afraid to disturb the dear old soul. (*Looking round him.*) Blunt, it strikes me we shall find our quarters here very comfortable—eh? (*falling into chair and stretching out his legs*).

BLUNT. I think so too, your honor (*imitating JACK, then jumping up again and saluting*). Beg pardon, your honor! but when you say *our* quarters—

JACK. I *mean* our quarters! You wouldn't think of leaving me, you brute, would you? Haven't we spent the last ten years of our lives together—more or less respectably?—and if I *have* got back to Old England again, sound in wind and limb, who have I to thank? who but you, you fine faithful old dog you (*laying his hand on BLUNT's shoulder*).

BLUNT (*deprecatingly*). Oh! oh!

JACK. If you forget a certain sabre cut I received at the Alma, I don't.

BLUNT. Oh! oh! just a little bit of a scratch.

JACK. Exactly; a little bit of a scratch that began at the top of my head and finished at the tip of my nose! I was lying on my back faint and sick, when a noble, lion-hearted fellow cut his way through the Russian cavalry at the risk of his life, the idiot, threw me across his horse, and saved me! That noble, lion-hearted idiot was Stephen Blunt—bless him! But enough of the past! By-the-bye, Blunt, as long as you are stationed here you must make it a point of finding everybody and everything about you charming, delightful—in short, first chop!

BLUNT (*touching his cap*). All right, your honor!

MRS. TARLETAN (*heard without*). If I am wanted, Martha, you'll find me in the garden.

JACK. Here comes my aunt; beat a retreat—quick, anywhere.

[BLUNT *hurries out at L. H.*

Enter MRS. TARLETAN at R.

MRS. T. (*seeing JACK*). A stranger?

JACK (*smiling*). Not quite. (*Going to her.*) Don't you know me, aunt?

MRS. T. Eh? (*Suddenly.*) Jack dear, dear boy! (*JACK clasps her in his arms*). Kiss me again, Jack.

JACK. Again and again till you tell me to leave off (*kissing her again*).

MRS. T. Let me look at you (*holding his head between her hands*). It is ten long years since I have seen you, my darling boy: and has it come back from China, a dear?

JACK. It has—all the way!

MRS. T. (*pulling his cheek affectionately*). And is it glad to get home?

JACK. Is it? *ain't* it? Ah! after knocking about the world for ten years, you don't know how happy a fellow feels in getting back to his aunt and having his cheeks pulled about. By-the-bye, aunt, what d'ye think?—what with my prize-money, the sale of my commission, and one thing and the other, I find I've managed to scrape together a matter of £10,000.

MRS. T. Ten thousand? that's a large sum of money, my dear.

JACK. An awful lot, isn't it? the puzzle is, what I'm to do with it.

MRS. T. My advice is, invest in land; they say "Stick to the land, and the land will stick to you."

JACK. I know *mud* will—at least it did in the Crimea.

MRS. T. My dear Jack, do be serious! Now that you are worth £500 a year—

JACK. Five hundred a year! I shall never spend the half of it.

Mrs. T. Then get a *wife* to help you.

JACK. A wife! me? what for?—why, my dear aunt, here are no end of clever people complaining of the over-population of the country, and you want me to— (*Shaking his head.*) No, no!

Mrs. T. Well, well, we'll say no more about it; though it's a pity—a great pity!

JACK. A pity! what do you mean?

Mrs. T. Nothing! a fancy, a dream of mine—that's all.

(JESSIE is heard singing a snatch of a song without—runs in from R. H.)

JESSIE (*running to Mrs. TARLETAN and kissing her*). Good-morning, aunty dear. (*Suddenly, seeing JACK.*) A stranger! Really, sir—I—I— (*Courtesying.*)

JACK (*bowing to JESSIE*). So do I, I'm sure, miss! very much indeed.

Mrs. T. (*smiling*). "Sir" and "miss?" Why, Jack, have you forgotten Jessie?

JACK. Eh? what? little Jessie!

JESSIE. Cousin Jack!

JACK (*taking both JESSIE's hands*). Dear, dear, when I remember what a tiny little mite you were ten years ago! about so high! (*measuring about a foot*). Why, I used to teach you A B C, didn't I? And now I suppose you're quite an accomplished young lady?

JESSIE. Tolerably so, I hope, cousin.

JACK. Then you deserve a prize; and here it is (*opening box on table, takes out a fan and presents it to JESSIE*). The reward of merit.

JESSIE. Oh, what a beautiful Chinese fan! Oh, thank you, cousin!

JACK. And perhaps our good aunt will give us our tea to-night out of her new porcelain service (*showing contents of box*).

MRS. T. A present for me, too! So you found time to think of me, dear boy?

JACK. Think of you! Do you remember this? (*taking small case from his breast-pocket and opening it*).

MRS. T. My photograph?

JACK. Which you gave me the night before I left England. You've never left me! You've shared all my hardships, all my dangers, all my triumphs! Didn't we enter Pekin together, sword in hand?

MRS. T. (*smiling*). I enter Pekin!

JACK. Yes; rolled up in three of my flannel waistcoats to protect you.

JESSIE. Oh, Cousin Jack, I do so long to hear all your adventures.

JACK. Then you shall have them; not all at once; mustn't be greedy, little girl. Now for it. (*They seat themselves.*) Ahem! (*in an impressive tone*). In order to make a first-rate brick—

MRS. T. and JESSIE. A brick?

JACK. Don't interrupt me! I repeat, in order to make a first-rate brick they put it on the kiln and bake it. Well, in order to make a first-rate soldier they send him to India and bake *him*—that was my case.

MRS. T. Well, from India you went to the Crimea?

JACK. Yes; there I took to rum, diluted with snowballs and gunpowder.

JESSIE. Poor Cousin! how you must have suffered!

JACK. Tolerably; but we ate well—when we'd got anything to eat—and slept well when we hadn't to keep awake.

JESSIE. And you were never wounded?

JACK. Nothing to speak of. I got rather a warm one at the Alma, but luckily it was on the head.

JESSIE. Cousin Jack, I really feel quite proud of you! that I do.

JACK. Then allow me to thank you in the name of the British

Army; allow the British Army to salute you! (*Kisses her. JESSIE joins Mrs. TARLETAN, who has gone a few steps up the stage.*)

JACK (*looking after JESSIE, and aside*). A remarkably nice little body. If ever I *should* marry, I really—

JESSIE (*to Mrs. TARLETAN, as they come forward*). No, indeed, aunt, there's no necessity for anything of the kind.

Mrs. T. I beg your pardon, my dear, Jack is one of the family.

JACK. Of course I am! What's the matter?

Mrs. T. Well, the fact is, we are not unlikely soon to find a husband for Jessie!

JACK. A husband! Who is he? what is he?

Mrs. T. I only know that he is a *protégé* of Doctor Jogtrot.

JACK. And who's Jogtrot?

Mrs. T. Jessie's guardian; a retired physician—a very eminent man in the scientific world.

JACK. Oh! ah! (*Aside.*) Confound Jogtrot!

MARTHA *appears at c., followed by* DOCTOR JOGTROT.

MARTHA (*announcing*). Doctor Jogtrot. (*Disappears.*)

Enter DOCTOR JOGTROT *at c.; black costume—white cravat, etc.*

JOGTROT (*to Mrs. TARLETAN*). Pardon me, madam, if I am late.

Mrs. T. Don't apologize, doctor. (*Introducing.*) My nephew, Captain Pepperpot—Doctor Jogtrot (*JOGTROT bows ceremoniously to JACK, who gives him a familiar nod in return*).

JOGTROT. I merely precede my esteemed young friend Mr. Chirper by a few minutes. Need I say I should not presume to present him as a competitor for the hand of this charming young lady (*bowing to JESSIE*), had I not discovered in his person qualities of the most solid description.

JACK. Solid—eh? I see! inclined to be stout—eh?

JOGTROT (*after a stare at JACK, and turning to Mrs. T. again*). In fact, I am proud to say that Mr. Chirper is, in the strictest sense of the word, a serious young man!

JACK (*aside*). Wheugh! I sha'n't be able to stand much more of Jogtrot! I feel I sha'n't.

MRS. T. No doubt I shall grieve to part with Jessie; but as my nephew has left the army, I shall not be entirely alone.

JOGTROT (*to JACK*). You are a military man, sir?

JACK (*who has been showing a gradual irritation*). I was—till I left the army.

JOGTROT. Left the army? Allow me to congratulate you on your having done so, sir!

JACK (*trying to keep cool*). May I ask *why*?

JOGTROT (*in a supercilious tone*). Because, between ourselves, sir, I consider the military profession—

JACK (*bristling up*). Well, sir, what about the military profession? Anything to say *against* the military profession? (*advancing on JOGTROT, who retreats*).

MRS. T. (*aside to JACK*). Don't be so pugnacious, Jack! Recollect, you're not at the siege of Sebastopol now!

JOGTROT (*overhearing them, eagerly*). The siege of Sebastopol?

MRS. T. Yes, doctor, my nephew was there during the whole campaign!

JOGTROT (*to JACK*). Now, sir, it may be in your power to furnish me with the most interesting statistical information. Can you form any tolerable accurate estimate of the number of projectiles of various kinds and dimensions discharged from the Russian batteries from the beginning of the siege to the end?

JACK. Frankly, my dear sir, I'm ashamed to say I never thought of counting them. (*Aside to MRS. TARLETAN.*) I wish to speak with all possible respect of this retired chemist and druggist of yours, but he's simply an inflated idiot!

JOGTROT. But to return to Mr. Chirper.

JACK. Yes, give us a little more about Dicky!

JOGTROT (*astounded*). Dicky?

JACK. Yes, same thing! Chirpers are all Dickies—Dickies, Chirpers, don't you see? Go on!

MARTHA, *entering at L.*

MARTHA. A gentleman, ma'am, sent in his card (*giving card to MRS. TARLETAN*).

MRS. T. (*reading*). "Mr. Christopher Chirper." Show the gentleman in. (*MARTHA goes to C., shows in CHIRPER, and then exits.*)

Enter CHIRPER, in a similar costume to JOGTROT.

JOGTROT (*meeting CHIRPER, and handing him forward and presenting him*). Allow me, Mrs. Tarletan—Mr. Christopher Chirper. Miss Jessie—Mr. Christopher Chirper. (*To JACK.*) Sir, Mr. Christopher Chirper. (*CHIRPER bows very solemnly to each.*)

JACK (*aside*). A cheerful-looking youth, very! one part waiter, three parts undertaker!

MRS. T. (*to CHIRPER*). The flattering terms in which Dr. Jogtrot has spoken of you more than suffice to insure you a hearty welcome!

CHIRP. (*bowing*). I trust, madam, I may merit the favorable opinion of my distinguished friend! Permit me to say, I am not one of those giddy, thoughtless butterflies who consume their mental and moral faculties in mundane futilities.

JACK (*after a long stare at CHIRPER—then aside*). He's not a man, he's a tract. (*Aside to JESSIE, as he goes towards table*). Lively boy, isn't he, Jessie? (*Sits and turns over leaves of an album.*)

CHIRP. My mode of life is simplicity itself. I rise at seven—

JACK. Oh, confound it!—hang it!—dash it! (*turning over leaves rapidly*).

CHIRP. Breakfast at eight—a slice of bread, a cup of milk; that constitutes my heartiest meal. I then walk for an hour in the square; dine at six.

JACK (*who has come down again*). Another cup of milk? You ought to keep a cow, Chirper, in the square.

CHIRP. I then plunge into my favorite studies, till I retire to my pillow. Such is my life, madam.

JACK. And a very jolly one, too, I should say, Chirper.

CHIRP. Ladies, I must now request permission to retire. I am due at the Philotechnic Institution.

MRS. T. (to CHIRPER). You'll return to luncheon, I hope?

JACK. Of course he will. (To CHIRPER.) Of course you will (*thrusting CHIRPER's hat and umbrella into his hands*). I'll see there's an extra ha'porth of milk taken in for you (*putting CHIRPER's hat on his head*).

[CHIRPER and JOGTROT bow to JESSIE and exeunt at C., MRS. TARLETAN going up stage with them.]

MRS. T. (*coming down*). A very, very agreeable young man indeed.

JESSIE (*satirically*). Yes; so remarkably sprightly.

JACK. With about as much humor in him as a damp umbrella.

MRS. T. (*a little nettled*). I repeat, Mr. Chirper is a very agreeable person. I would put it to anybody—to the very first comer.

JACK. Would you? That's a bargain (*seeing BLUNT, who appears at C.*). There's my man, Stephen Blunt—he'll do; you said the first comer. Here, Blunt (*BLUNT advances*), tell me what's your opinion of the gentleman who has just gone?

BLUNT (*aside to JACK, knowingly*). All right, captain, I haven't forgot. (*Aloud.*) Well, sir, I think he's charming, delightful, first-chop.

JACK (*quickly*). No, no! I mean the other—the young one.

BLUNT. Well, sir, I think he's first-chop, too.

JACK. Ugh! triple dolt, brute, idiot. (*BLUNT about to speak.*) Silence! get out! Stop, come and dress me! Ugh! pudding-head (*shakes his fist at BLUNT and hurries out L. H., followed by BLUNT*).

MRS. T. Why, what's the matter with the boy? such a temper all of a sudden.

JESSIE (*pouting*). No wonder; he sees well enough that you're tired of me—that you want to get rid of me—that you—oh! oh! oh!

[Runs out crying at R.]

Mrs. T. (*astonished*). There's some mystery here I must clear up. Jessie! Jessie! [*Hastens out after JESSIE at R.*]

JACK (*without, at L. H., very loud and angrily*). Hold your tongue! don't answer me! don't be insolent!—there, there! (*Enters hurriedly from L. H.*) Wheugh! I'm better now I've let off some of the steam! ha, ha! Poor old Blunt (*stopping suddenly*). Stop, there's nothing to laugh at. I know I was a little bit out of temper—whose fault but his if I was?—with his infernal “first-chop;” but I'd no business to strike the poor fellow, with my foot especially; I ought to be ashamed of myself. Ought to be? I am! Here he comes (*seeing BLUNT, who enters at L. H., looking pale and serious; after a little hesitation JACK walks up to him*). Stephen Blunt, I ask your pardon; there, that's settled; now shake hands (*holds out his hand; BLUNT looks away*). I'm sorry, Blunt, *very* sorry; would you like to kick me? or shall I kick myself? I'll try if you like!

BLUNT. I'd rather you had blown my brains out, captain. If any other man in the world had—had—you know what I mean—I'd have knocked him down.

JACK (*quietly*). Then knock me down!

BLUNT. As you are now, sir? no! but in a fair stand-up fight I would!—at least I'd try!

JACK (*with sudden excitement*). What's that? Stand-up fight? this sort of thing? (*sparring and hitting out*).

BLUNT (*with a broad grin*). That's it, sir! If you'd only just let me knock you about for a round or two, I should feel like a man again!

JACK (*aside*). I rather like this! I do, by Jove! There's some fun in having one's head punched by one's servant! (*Aloud.*) All right, old boy! you shall have satisfaction after your own fashion! Look out for some nice quiet spot, and in ten minutes' time we'll have it out; in the mean time, mum, not a word.

[BLUNT runs out at C., rubbing his hands in high glee.]

JACK (*after a pause*). I'd better by half have stopped in China!

I can't stop *here*! I can't look quietly on—probably with my eye bunged up—and see the woman I love married to a Dicky! No, no; I'll pack up at once!

(MRS. TARLETAN and JESSIE have entered R. H. during the above.)

MRS. T. (*overhearing*). Pack up?

JACK. Yes, aunt. I'm off—good-by!

MRS. T. Off? Where—where?

JACK. I don't know; somewhere or other—if not there, somewhere else. Good-by!

MRS. T. John Pepperpot, you are deceiving me! I want the truth! you hear, sir, the *truth*!

JACK. Do you? then you shall have it! I love Jessie—there! now you've got it!

JESSIE (*joyously*). You hear, aunty? He loves me; *me* whom you are about to sacrifice—to immolate! (*in a tragic tone*).

JACK. On the altar of a Chirper! (*in a similar tone*).

JESSIE. It's cruel!

JACK. Barbarous!

JESSIE. Inhuman!

JACK. Savage!

MRS. T. (*who has been trying to speak*). Will you let me speak?
(To JACK.) You say you love Jessie?

JACK. Awfully!

MRS. T. Well—unless, indeed, Jessie objects—

JESSIE (*very quietly*). But I don't!

MRS. T. In that case, the sooner you get married the better!

JESSIE. Oh, you kindest, best of aunties! (*kissing her*).

MRS. T. Well, Jack, have *you* nothing to say to me?

JACK. Only this: that you can't form the faintest idea what a trump you are!

MRS. T. (*suddenly*). But what about poor Mr. Chirper? He'll be here presently.

JACK. Of course, the sooner we put Dicky's pipe out the better.

MRS. T. I will speak to Dr. Jogtrot myself, and beg him to break the intelligence to his young friend.

JACK. Very well (*seeing BLUNT, who crosses at back*). Blunt, by Jove! (*Exchanges a sign with BLUNT, who disappears*). Excuse me for a few minutes—I'll be back directly (*hurries up towards c., running against JOGTROT, who enters*). Beg pardon. (*Aside to him*.) My aunt's got a little bit of news for you that'll rather astonish your upper works. [*Runs out at c.*]

MRS. T. You had better retire, Jessie. (*Aside to her*.) Leave everything to me! [*JESSIE exits at R. H.*]

JOGTROT. It seems, my dear lady, you have a communication to make to me?

MRS. T. I have; a very important one! I have just made a discovery which I confess has given me the greatest possible pleasure. In a word, my nephew loves Jessie, and Jessie loves my nephew!

JOGTROT (*very quietly*). In other words, Mr. Chirper is expected to resign his pretensions in your nephew's favor?

MRS. T. Exactly!

JOGTROT. My answer, madam, will be brief! I presented Mr. Chirper as a candidate for the hand of your niece, and, *my* word, you received him graciously. I cannot, therefore, become an accomplice in your inconsistency, not to say *caprice*!

MRS. T. (*impatiently*). But don't I tell you the young people love each other?

JOGTROT (*very quietly*). What of that?

MRS. T. (*indignantly*). What of that?

JOGTROT. I myself have loved, madam!

MRS. T. But perhaps the lady did not love you in return?

JOGTROT. She did, madam, intensely! and married her dancing-master!

MRS. T. (*in a compassionate tone*). Dear, dear! Of course you were inconsolable!

JOETROT. No, madam, I went in for trigonometry, and that cured me! Why should your nephew not do the same?

MRS. T. Jack go in for trigonometry? ha! ha! Come, my dear doctor, you'll explain the state of affairs to Mr. Chirper, won't you? (*coaxingly*).

JOETROT (*very stiffly*). Certainly not, madam!

MRS. T. (*angrily*). Then I will—and in the mean time I beg to assure you that I consider you a very uncivil, unamiable, and intensely disagreeable person! [*Exit at L. H.*]

JOETROT. Umph! a decided check for Chirper—who, if he loses the young lady, will also lose the thousand pounds I owe him. But it isn't necessarily checkmate. No, no! as the young lady's legal guardian I shall have something to say yet!

Enter JACK hastily at c., putting on his coat.

JACK (*laughing as he enters*). Ha! ha! poor old Blunt! he soon had enough of it! (*Seeing DOCTOR.*) Well, you've seen my aunt—eh? She rather astonished you, didn't she? But really, now (*taking JOETROT's arm familiarly*), you never thought your man had the ghost of a chance, did you?

JOETROT. My man?

JACK. Yes, Dicky! here he is! (*going up to meet CHIRPER, who enters at c.*) (*Aside to him.*) Our intellectual friend has something to tell you! Be a man, Dicky (*slapping him on the back*). It's no use crying over spilt milk, my Trojan!

[*Exit at c., CHIRPER staring after him in astonishment.*]

JOETROT (*aside*). There are circumstances under which a fib becomes a duty. (*Aloud, and grasping CHIRPER's hand.*) I congratulate you, she's yours! At least she will be!

CHIRPER (*very quietly*). Oh, joyful tidings.

JOETROT. But it is possible you may have a rival.

CHIRPER (*very quietly again*). Oh, maddening thought!

JOETROT. But follow my advice and you shall win her yet. Never leave her side! say all sorts of tender things to her. By-

the-bye, have you brought her a bouquet? No! Then go and get one—the bigger the better. Go at once—recollect, the bigger the better (*hurrying CHIRPER up stage, who goes out at c., shouting after him*)—the bigger the better!

JOGTROT (*coming down—then suddenly*). By no means a bad idea of mine; at any rate, it's well worth the trial! Surely this fire-eating captain must have *some* blemish—*some* small vice or other, I don't care *how* small. I'll undertake to stretch it as far as it will go! Here comes his servant; I may be able to squeeze something out of *him*.

Enter BLUNT at c., one of his cheeks very swollen.

JOGTROT (*beckoning BLUNT*). Here, my worthy creature! I wish to speak to you. (*BLUNT touches his cap and advances.*) A swollen face, I see! Toothache?

BLUNT. No, sir. I'll tell you how it was. *I* makes a feint with my left (*hitting out, JOGTROT skips back*), when slap comes a right-hander straight from the elbow (*hitting out again, JOGTROT skips back again*), and catches me bang on the—

JOGTROT. Yes; yes! exactly; but tell me, have you been long with your gallant master?

BLUNT. Better than ten years, sir!

JOGTROT. The more to your credit, my fine fellow! here's a sovereign (*gives money*).

BLUNT. Thankee, sir! (*Aside.*) What's his little game, I wonder?

JOGTROT. I like the captain! I like him much! Rather a lively temper, perhaps; a little bit quarrelsome—eh? slightly pugnacious—umph!—and a sad fellow among the women, I'm afraid! Ha! ha! ha! (*poking BLUNT in the side*).

BLUNT. Who? Master? Not he! Only bring him face to face with a pretty wench, and see if he don't stand there a-stammering and blushing like any big lubberly school-boy.

JOGTROT (*aside*). The scoundrel *won't* speak! (*Aloud.*) I gave

you a sovereign just now; oblige me by getting it changed for me.

BLUNT (*aside*). So, so. Wanted to pump me, did he? I'll bring him a pound's worth of coppers!

[*Goes up, meets JACK, who enters at c., stops and whispers JACK, pointing to JOGTROT, then exit at c.*]

JACK. So, so! my serious friend, you not only, as my aunt tells me, refuse to withdraw your man, but you've been pumping Blunt about me, have you? (*touching JOGTROT on the shoulder*). You can spare me time for half a dozen words? Thank you (*very quietly*). It seems you are not over and above anxious that I should marry my cousin? (*very quietly*).

JOGTROT. Frankly, I am *not*!

JACK (*still very quietly*). May I ask *why*?

JOGTROT (*aside*). He doesn't seem very explosive. I'll go it a bit! (*Aloud.*) In the first place, from my limited acquaintance with military men, I confess—I—(*shrugging his shoulders*).

JACK (*still very quietly*). Well, sir?

JOGTROT (*aside*). He doesn't seem *at all* explosive! I'll go it another bit. (*Aloud.*) And although you have left the army, you can scarcely have failed to contract certain habits and pursuits, which, in my opinion, are more or less antagonistic to happiness in the married state!

JACK (*aside*). I'm getting the fidgets in my right leg! (*Aloud.*) In short, you look upon me as a decidedly disreputable person? (*with difficulty restraining his passion*).

JOGTROT (*alarmed and very quickly*). I didn't say so! (*Aside.*) I sha'n't go it any more bits. (*Aloud.*) But *seriously*! you don't, you *can't* really believe you love your cousin? You've only just returned from China.

JACK. What of that, as long as I didn't leave my heart behind me?

JOGTROT. Still, this sudden, *very* sudden, *remarkably* sudden

attachment, some people might be ill-natured enough to—to—to—

JACK (*with increasing impatience*). When you've quite done "to—to—toing," perhaps you'll get on.

JOGTROT. I repeat, some people might attribute to the lady's fortune, rather than to the lady herself (*with intention*).

JACK. Fortune? What, Jessie? (*After a short pause.*) Well, so much the better! Not that I was aware of it.

JOGTROT (*smiling significantly*). Oh, you were *not* aware of it, eh?

JACK (*checking his anger*). I have said so once, sir!

JOGTROT (*smiling satirically*). Yes, you *said* so, certainly!

JACK (*gulping down his anger, and very quietly*). Have you quite done? Then suppose we change the conversation! Now, if the thing were properly put to you, which do you think you would prefer?—having your nose pulled (JOGTROT *retreats*), a sound horse-whipping (JOGTROT *takes another jump backward*), or a good kicking (*swinging his right leg about*; JOGTROT *rushes out at c.*).

JACK. Ha! ha! ha! (*Suddenly stopping.*) Zounds! these infernal little pets of mine will be the ruin of me! Of course he'll tell aunt—she'll scold—Jessie'll blubber—so shall I—at least I'll try. Our marriage will be— But he can't have left the house yet! I'll run after him! Memorandum for the future—when you feel a sudden impulse to strangle a man, *do it*.

[*Runs out at c. after JOGTROT.*]

Enter MRS. TARLETAN and JESSIE, followed by JOGTROT.

MRS. T. Surely, doctor, you must be mistaken? the thing is impossible!

JOGTROT. I grieve to say I have it from the best authority! an eye-witness. Half an hour ago, almost under this very roof, your nephew was engaged in a low, vulgar, disreputable, pugilistic encounter with his own servant!

MRS. T. A pugilistic encounter? But the reason?—the motive?

JOGTROT (*with malicious intention*). Is perhaps not very difficult to guess! Your waiting-woman, my informant, is a very comely young person; both master and man *may* have noticed it too—young men *will* be young men—a little *jealousy* perhaps? (MRS. TARLETAN *hastily rings small bell which is on the table*.)

Enter MARTHA at R. H.

MRS. T. Come here, Martha! You have informed Doctor Jogtrot that you witnessed a scene recently, which I need not describe, between Captain Pepperpot and his servant. Is this true?

MARTHA. Yes, ma'am; they were hard at it, ma'am, behind the summer-house, ma'am, a fisticuffing one another (*imitating absurdly*).

MRS. T. Tell me, has this man—Blunt, I think, is his name—ever given you reason to think he—adores you?

MARTHA. Only so far as saying I was a niceish sort of girl! But lots have told me *that*!

JESSIE (*very eagerly*). And—his *master*—perhaps *he* may have—

MARTHA. Well, miss, the captain has certainly chucked me under the chin once or twice, but lots have done *that*!

MRS. T. You can go, Martha! [*Exit MARTHA at R. H.*]

JESSIE. Oh, auntie, this is dreadful! I never could have believed it of Jack! never! (*stops on a sign from MRS. TARLETAN, who sees JACK enter at L. H.*).

JACK (*as he enters hurriedly*). Can't find him anywhere. (*Seeing JOGTROT.*) So, so! he's stolen a march on me. (*Aside to MRS. TARLETAN.*) Auntie, I suspect our serious friend here has been giving you *his* version of a certain little trumpery affair that—that—

MRS. T. (*coldly*). He *has*!

JACK. Well, I confess I *was* just a trifle hasty! One of my little pets, you know; but if you only knew the provocation—

MRS. T. (*satirically*). We do know the provocation!

JESSIE (*imitating MRS. TARLETAN's tone*). Yes, we do know the provocation!

MRS. T. Come with me, doctor! We must have a little conversation—*serious* conversation!

JOGTROT. At your service, my dear madam. (*Aside*.) I wonder how our gallant friend feels now!

[*Exit at C. with MRS. TARLETAN, JACK staring after them bewildered.*]

JACK. Jessie!

JESSIE (*very dignified*). Sir!

JACK (*astonished*). "Sir!" What's the matter? You seem annoyed—vexed.

JESSIE. I am!

JACK. Will you tell me why?

JESSIE (*with comic severity*). Ask your conscience, young man!

[*Enter MARTHA at C., carrying an enormous bouquet.*]

MARTHA. This beautiful nosegay, miss—just come—with Mr. Chirper's compliments. [*Gives nosegay, and exit R. H.*]

JESSIE. What a lovely bouquet! How very polite of Mr. Chirper!

JACK (*sulkily*). There's plenty of it; looks more like a bunch of greens! Of course, Jessie, you won't accept it?

JESSIE (*coldly*). Why not? I'm fond of flowers!

JACK. Yes, but you're not fond of Dicky! Come, Jessie, you'll return that bunch of greens—I mean that nosegay—to Mr. Chirper, won't you?

JESSIE (*pretending to admire the flowers*). Certainly not!

JACK (*checking his rising anger*). Take care, Jessie! I ask you once again!

JESSIE. I shall keep it!

JACK (*tenderly*). Jessie!—cousin!

JESSIE. I repeat, I shall keep it!

JACK (*furiously*). You shall not! (*snatching bouquet from JESSIE and tearing it to pieces*). There, there, there! (*JESSIE screams*).

Enter MRS. TARLETAN at c., followed by DOCTOR JOGTROT.

JESSIE. Oh, aunty (*running to her*), and you, sir (*to JOGTROT*), protect me from the violence of my cousin! Because Mr. Chirper sent me a nosegay, he has snatched it from me and torn it to pieces!

JOGTROT (*advancing to JACK*). Young man, I am amazed—

JACK. Go to the devil! (*furiously; JOGTROT beats a retreat*).

MRS. T. (*sorrowfully*). Oh, Jack, Jack!

JACK. Harkee, aunt, it strikes me I've been made to play rather a ridiculous part here. First, it's all Dicky, then it's all *me*! Now, it's all Dicky again! One would almost think I had been used merely as a bait to catch a bigger fish!

MRS. T. (*reproachfully*). Oh, nephew, nephew!

JOGTROT (*advancing*). If you allude to Mr. Chirper, sir—

JACK. Damn Mr. Chirper!

[*Hurries up, giving nosegay a violent kick, and exit*

L. H., *slamming door violently after him*.]

MRS. T. What a dreadful scene.

JESSIE (*half crying*). I'll never marry him!—never! never! never! (*picking up the flowers*).

MRS. T. Reflect, Jessie, reflect!

JESSIE. I *have* reflected (*trying to restrain her tears*). Mr. Chirper may be a trifle *slow*—and too fond of milk—but he wouldn't be always chucking young women under the chin—and fisti—fisti—cutting—I mean *cuffing*!

JOGTROT. Then I may at once convey the joyful tidings to the thrice-happy Chirper.

JESSIE. (*harshly*). Yes! yes! the sooner the better.

[*JOGTROT hurries out at c.*]

MRS. T. Oh, my darling! I fear you have been too rash—too impetuous.

JESSIE. No! I—I—(*suddenly throwing herself sobbing violently into MRS. TARLETON'S arms*).

BLUNT (*heard without*). All right, captain!

Enter BLUNT at L. H., carrying a portmanteau.

MRS. T. (*to BLUNT*). Where are you taking that luggage?

BLUNT. To the nearest hotel hereabouts, ma'am. Master's off directly, and I'm going with him!

MRS. T. Oh, then you bear him no malice?

BLUNT. Malice—me! What for, ma'am?

MRS. T. Pshaw!—in a word, I know what has lately taken place between you.

JESSIE. Yes! the fisti—fisti—you know (*with a lame imitation of sparring*).

MRS. T. (*with intention*). And we also know the cause!

BLUNT. Do you? and do you think I'd leave the captain just because of a little—little bit of a—kicking?

MRS. T. What? Then it wasn't about—her?

BLUNT (*surprised*). Her?

JESSIE. Yes. M—Martha!

BLUNT. What! me and master fall out about a petticoat? Ha! ha! Not we! I suppose I had offended him somehow or other, and he got into one of his "little pets," and—struck me—not with his hand, ma'am. It nearly broke my heart. He saw it, and, like a true gentleman as he is, he asks me, with almost tears in his eyes, to give him a good hiding, and we sets at it at once then and there; and that's all about it, ma'am.

MRS. T. (*suddenly*). Take that luggage away. Not a word. Remember, I am commanding officer here! (*BLUNT makes a salute*). In the mean time I'll see your master.

JESSIE. Yes, we'll see your master.

BLUNT. Do please, ladies; and if you'd only try just to cheer him up a bit.

JESSIE (*eagerly*). Is he unhappy, then?

BLUNT. All I know is, as he was ramming his things into his portmanteau with his fists—this sort of thing (*imitating*).—I saw a great big one hanging to the tip of his nose.

JESSIE. A great big what? Not a tear?

BLUNT. Yes, miss! he said it was a cold in his head, but I know better.

JACK (*heard from room L. H.*). Blunt! Blunt!

BLUNT. Coming, sir! (*about to run to the door L. H.*).

MRS. T. (*pointing to C.*). That way, if you please. Remember, obedience is the first duty of a soldier.

[BLUNT *makes a salute, and exit at C. with portmanteau.*]

JESSIE. Oh, aunty! only fancy poor Jack with a tear hanging to the tip of his great big nose—I mean, a great big tear! Why, *why* did you let me tell my guardian that I'd never marry Jack? *Do* run after him, and tell him I've changed my mind, and that I'll *never*, never, never marry any one else. *Do* make haste, aunty dear. *Do* be a little bit impetuous like me (*during this she has urged MRS. TARLETAN towards C.*).

MRS. T. (*laughing*). Spoiled child! spoiled child! (*kisses her, and hurries out at C.*).

Enter JACK at door L. H., dressed in tweed travelling suit, an overcoat over his arm, and a small bag in his hand,

JACK (*stops on seeing JESSIE*). A thousand pardons, Jes—I mean Miss Manvers. I expected to find my aunt.

JESSIE (*archly*). And you are disappointed at finding only *me*?

JACK (*aside*). What unseemly levity! (*Aloud.*) I cannot leave her roof without wishing her good-by.

JESSIE. Of course not—but you're not going? (*smiling*).

JACK (*assuming a very dignified manner*). I beg your pardon, miss!

JESSIE (*imitating JACK*). I beg yours, sir!

JACK. What! remain here and see you married?

JESSIE. Of course; how *can* I get married unless you *do* remain?

JACK (*indignantly*). You don't expect me to give Dicky away, I hope?

JESSIE. No; but I certainly *do* expect you will give yourself away! and to me who love you, oh, so dearly!

JACK (*throwing away his coat, etc., and clasping JESSIE in his arms*). Jessie darling! But what—what does it all mean?

JESSIE (*very rapidly*). That I know *why* you got fisti—fisti—you know—with your servant; that it wasn't about Martha at all; that all my guardian said about you was a great big story!

JACK. Oh! oh! So old Jogtrot has been poking his ugly nose into my affairs again, has he? (*Savagely.*) I'll wring it off!

JESSIE (*holding up her finger*). Now listen to me, Cousin Jack; if you cannot and do not control that dreadfully peppery temper of yours—

JACK (*very quickly*). But I *will*! I swear it by—by this (*taking small hand-bell off table*). Now, Jessie, if ever you see me getting the least little bit frantic, you've only to—

JESSIE. I understand (*taking bell and ringing it*).

JACK. That's it!

JESSIE (*looking towards c.*). Here comes my guardian; now do as I tell you. Go over there (*pointing*; JACK *moves a few paces from her*); farther than that! Now cross your arms (JACK *obeys*); look sulky!

JACK. This sort of thing? (*putting on a sulky look*).

JESSIE. Worse than that (JACK *puts on a hideous grimace*). That's better! Now turn your back to me (JACK *obeys*; JESSIE *also turns her back on JACK*).

JACK (*looking round*). Isn't there time just for one kiss?

JESSIE. No—no.

JACK. Only a tiny one!

JESSIE. Hush! (*they both hastily resume their positions back to back*).

Enter JOGTROT at c.

JOGTROT (*seeing them*). Dos-à-dos! The lady pouting—the gentleman frowning! Then the storm I contrived to raise is still at its height (*coming down and touching JACK on the shoulder*; JACK turns to him with an intensely savage expression of face, making JOGTROT start back).

JOGTROT (*in a soothing tone*). Cheer up, my gallant young friend; the sex, you know, is capricious—"sipping each flower, changing each hour." It is sad—very sad!

JACK (*sulkily*). For me, not for you, who have always opposed my marriage with my cousin.

JOGTROT. I? On the contrary, not ten minutes ago I asked her if she had any lingering affection for you, and her answer was—

JESSIE. That I would marry Mr. Chirper.

JOGTROT. There, there! you hear?

JESSIE. Yes, but (*imitating JOGTROT*), "the sex is so capricious," you know—"sipping each flower, changing each hour." So now, Guardy, I'll marry Jack, please (*bobbing a courtesy*; then running to JACK, who takes her in his arms).

JOGTROT (*shouting*). Stop! that's all wrong (*seeing MRS. TARLETAN and CHIRPER, who enter at c.*). You're just in time, madam! There's a gigantic, a colossal mistake here!

MRS. T. (*smiling*). A mistake? Not at all!

JOGTROT. Not at all! Am I to understand, then, madam, that after the deplorable—scandalous scene of this morning—

MRS. T. Which has been fully explained, and will never be repeated!

JACK. Never! I've sworn it (*looking at JESSIE and pointing to the small bell on the table*). No more tempers, no more "little pets."

JOGTROT (*aside*). One more chance! (*Aloud.*) All I desire is my ward's happiness! happiness!—poor girl! (*shrugging his shoulders and giving a deep sigh*).

JACK (*bridling up sharply*). What's that?

JOGTROT (*sneeringly*). I believe, sir, I have already expressed my opinion of military men—as *husbands*!

JACK (*threateningly*). Take my advice, sir, and leave military men alone, or else— (*JESSIE takes small bell and rings it; JACK falls into chair laughing.*)

JOGTROT. In a word—

MRS. T. Pardon me, doctor, you have said quite enough already!

JESSIE (*indignantly*). More than enough, Doctor Jogtrot! (*advancing on JOGTROT, who retreats; she follows him up*). For the last ten minutes you've been insulting a better man than yourself, Doctor Jogtrot!—a *far* better man, Doctor Jogtrot!

JACK (*aside*). Halloo! here's JESSIE getting into a pet! (*takes second small bell and rings it; JESSIE and JACK fall into chairs roaring with laughter and ringing their bells, JOGTROT staring at them in astonishment*).

CHIRPER (*to JOGTROT, in a sympathizing tone*). My dear respected friend—

JOGTROT (*turning fiercely on CHIRPER*). And you! standing there like a gaping idiot—ugh!

JACK. Oh, Dicky's all right! he's got his cow; hain't you, Dicky?

CHIRPER. And the Philotechnic, where, by-the-bye, I am now due.

JOGTROT. So am I. Come along (*slams his hat on his head, puts his arm in CHIRPER's, swings him round, and drags him out at c.*).

JACK (*taking JESSIE's hand*). Mine! mine at last!

JESSIE (*smiling*). But remember, Jack, no more irritability, no more tempers.

JACK. No! Here, here I vow, protest, and declare is the last of Pepperpot's little *Pets*! (*kisses JESSIE's hand as curtain falls*).

AFTER A STORM COMES A CALM.

Comedietta, in One Act.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

MAJOR PELICAN.

DR. VICESSIMUS PRETTYWELL.

JOSEPH (a servant).

MRS. PELICAN.

MRS. MAJOR PELICAN.

FANNY.

SCENE.—Major Pelican's Villa in St. John's Wood.

A handsomely furnished apartment. Door at c., doors R. H. and L. H.; a window at back, at R. C.

JOSEPH (*discovered lounging in an easy-chair, his legs upon another, a newspaper open in his hand*). Now, then, for a quiet squint at the sporting intelligence. See if I can't pick out a likely one for the Great Cricklewood Handicap. (*Bell rings at L. H.*) Of course! No indulging in literary pursuits in this house! That's the young missus's bell, and she can't bear being kept waiting. Well, I suppose it's only natural for young people to be impatient (*getting up and going towards L. H.; bell at R. H. is heard to ring*). Now the old lady's at it, and she's always in a hurry, she is! Well, I suppose old people can't afford to wait (*going towards door R. H.; bell at L. H. rings again, then the bell at R. H.; then both bells are rung violently; JOSEPH running backward and forward*).

Enter MAJOR PELICAN at c.

MAJOR. Well, Joseph, don't you hear the bell?

JOSEPH. I hear two of them, sir.

MAJOR. Then why don't you go?

JOSEPH. I don't know which way to go, sir! I can't answer both bells at once, sir! (*here both bells are heard to ring again*).

Enter DOCTOR PRETTYWELL at c.

JOSEPH (*to MAJOR*). What am I to do, sir?

DOCTOR (*coming down*). Do what you are doing now!

JOSEPH. I ain't doing nothing, sir.

DOCTOR. Then keep on doing nothing. It's about the best thing you *can* do.

JOSEPH. But I shall catch it from *both* my missusses, sir!

DOCTOR. At first perhaps you *will*; but when they find they've both fared alike, they'll each feel secretly flattered by the inattention you show to the other. Go to your work.

JOSEPH. Yes, sir.

[*Exit at c.*]

DOCTOR. Well, friend Jeremiah!

MAJOR. Well, friend Vicessimus!

DOCTOR. I seem to have dropped in at rather an unlucky moment; but frankly, if I were to wait till your domestic barometer pointed to "calm and settled" weather, I'm afraid my visits wouldn't be very frequent.

MAJOR. True, my dear doctor.

DOCTOR. I don't know how you manage it, but you generally contrive to have a thunder-storm, more or less violent, rumbling over this house of yours.

MAJOR. True again, and I'll tell you why. Because this "house of mine," as you call it, is constantly exposed to two discordant elements from opposite directions, but invariably coming into contact and exploding *here*!

DOCTOR. I don't exactly understand.

MAJOR. It's very simple. Living here with my mother and my wife, who *both* claim to be "monarch of all they survey," I, the master of the house—

DOCTOR. Find yourself cutting rather a contemptible figure—eh?

MAJOR. Very much so. It would be easy enough to do as Georgina wishes, *or* my mother, but to do as they *both* wish is impossible, for the simple reason that no two women ever wish the same thing, *consequently*, the result is anger on one side, sulky looks on the other; one invokes her title of "mother," the other her privileges of "wife;" consequently, between the two—

DOCTOR. You come in for more kicks than half-pence?

MAJOR. Considerably more! In fact, *all* kicks.

DOCTOR. And yet I don't know a more charming, amiable person than your excellent mother. I've known and admired her for more than thirty years; in fact, had it depended on me, I might very possibly have been your father.

MAJOR. Thank you. But I'm very well satisfied as I am; besides, the thing couldn't be done now.

DOCTOR. Not conveniently! However, she preferred marrying the "author of your being," so there was an end of my romance! But to return to these unfortunate domestic quarrels; from what I know of your mother, I am convinced the fault lies with your wife.

MAJOR. And from what I know of my wife, I'm certain it lies with my mother.

DOCTOR. Then, my good friend, why not at once put an end to these personal and conjugal troubles of yours?

MAJOR. How?

DOCTOR. Simply thus. Appoint one of the two contending parties—no matter which—to the sole control of your domestic affairs; support her authority through thick and thin, give her credit for always being right, even when she's wrong, and the thing's done!

MAJOR. A very good plan, I dare say, but, unluckily, it's impracticable.

DOCTOR. Why?

MAJOR. Because it would require a considerable amount of *pluck* to carry it out, and I hain't got an atom.

DOCTOR. Nonsense! You've only to show a proper spirit.

MAJOR. How can I do that when I hain't any spirit *at all*?

DOCTOR. Pahaw! Recollect, Nero was a perfect lamb at starting, and yet he fiddled when Rome was burning.

MAJOR. But I'm not a Nero! Besides, I hain't got a fiddle, and I couldn't fiddle if I had.

MRS. P. } (*from rooms R. and L.—together*). Joseph!

MRS. MAJOR. } Joseph!

DOCTOR. Here they both come! Do as I tell you, pluck up a proper spirit; in the mean time I'll beat a retreat (*runs out etc.*).

MAJOR (*shouting after him*). Coward! to leave me alone to the mercy of two exasperated females!

Enter MRS. PELICAN hurriedly at R. H.

MRS. P. This is perfectly intolerable!

MRS. MAJOR. It's absolutely unbearable! (*entering hurriedly at L. H.*).

MRS. P. To take no notice of my bell!

MRS. MAJOR. What's the use of my ringing?

MRS. P. Oh! here you are, son Jeremiah.

MAJOR. Yes, my dear mother; (*aside*) and I devoutly wish I was anywhere else!

MRS. P. (*turning him round towards her*). I appeal to you to see that my authority in this house is respected!

MAJOR (*with pretended surprise*). What! Has any one dared—

MRS. MAJOR (*turning him towards her*). I presume you won't allow *me* to be treated with inattention?

MAJOR (*with pretended surprise again*). What! Has any one presumed—

MRS. P. (*aside to him*). But what's the matter with your wife? She seems out of temper!

MAJOR. Yes! because Joseph didn't attend to her summons at once. When *you* require him, he knows better than to do *that*!

MRS. MAJOR (*aside to him*). Your mother appears annoyed at something or other?

MAJOR. No wonder! Joseph didn't answer her bell. He knows better than keep *you* waiting. (*Aside.*) What a humbug I am!

MRS. P. By-the-bye, Jeremiah, I have ordered dinner an hour later to-day.

MRS. MAJOR. Indeed? and for what reason, pray?

MRS. P. Because it suits me.

MAJOR. Oh! of course, my dear Georgina, if it suits her—

MRS. MAJOR. But it doesn't suit *me*. I expect Mr. Simcox, the jeweller, early this evening, and cannot dine later than five.

MAJOR. Oh! of course, my dear mother, if she expects Mr. Simcox—

MRS. P. It's too late now, the dinner will be served at six o'clock.

MRS. MAJOR. I won't give way! It will be on the table at five.

MRS. P. Six.

MRS. MAJOR. Five.

MAJOR (*aside*). There they are again! hard at it! hammer and tongs!

Enter JOSEPH, running, at c.

JOSEPH. Please, ma'am, please, sir, here's Miss Fanny just driven up in a cab from the station!

MRS. P. Fanny!

MAJOR. What can have brought her back?

FANNY (*heard speaking off at c.*). Gently, my good man, with that box! My best hat's in it! such a beauty too! (*runs in at c.; she is in a light summer travelling costume*). Here I am! How astonished you all look! Ha! ha! ha! (*Running to MRS. MAJOR P.*) Dear Georgina! so glad to see you once again (*kissing her—Nodding to MAJOR*). How do, brother Jeremiah? and you, dear mamma? (*about to kiss MRS. PELICAN*).

MRS. P. (*stiffly*). I was not aware, miss, that it was usual for a well-educated young lady to address her sister-in-law before her mother!

FANNY. Did I? So sorry, dear mamma. I really didn't see you at first.

MAJOR (*aside*). I'm sure she's big enough!

FANNY (*holding up her face to Mrs. P.*). Well, mamma, won't you kiss me? (*Styly.*) You know you're punishing yourself as well as me.

MRS. P. Who can resist the dear child? (*kissing FANNY*). But we thought your visit to your Cheltenham friends was intended to last another week?

FANNY. So it was, but they were obliged to return to town, so they brought me with them, put my luggage into a cab at the station, me on the top—I mean my luggage on the top—and here I am!

Enter JOSEPH at L. H.

JOSEPH. Luncheon is on the table, sir.

MRS. P. Very well, Joseph. (*Aside to MAJOR.*) Don't forget what I said about the dinner.

MAJOR (*aside to her*). All right; six o'clock, sharp!

MRS. MAJOR (*aside to MAJOR*). Remember what I decided about the dinner-hour!

MAJOR (*aside to her*). All right; five o'clock, sharp! (*Aside.*) Between the two the chances are I sha'n't get any dinner at all!

[*Exeunt MRS. PELICAN and MAJOR at R. H.*]

FANNY. I'm so glad we're alone at last, Georgina; we can have a nice long chat together all alone; and I've such a lot to tell you!

MRS. MAJOR. Well, I'm all attention! But first, how did you enjoy your trip to Cheltenham?

FANNY. Not much. I found it rather slow. Nothing but a collection of bilious-looking fogies being wheeled about in Bath-chairs. But never mind that; I've something else to talk about!

MRS. MAJOR (*smiling*). Something very serious, no doubt.

FANNY. Awfully serious! Listen! At the very first ball I went to at the Assembly-rooms—

MRS. MAJOR. A very brilliant affair, of course!

FANNY. Really, Georgina, if you keep on interrupting me in this sort of way—

MRS. MAJOR. I beg your pardon! Well?

FANNY. Well, at my very first ball I danced with a gentleman once or twice—perhaps three or four times.

MRS. MAJOR. Young, of course (*smiling*).

FANNY. Rather!

MRS. MAJOR. Handsome?

FANNY (*very quickly*). Very! Well, judge of my surprise when, the very next morning, as I was sitting in the drawing-room, the door opened and the servant announced "Captain Boodle!"

MRS. MAJOR. The "young gentleman?" (*smiling*).

FANNY. Yes.

MRS. MAJOR. Perhaps you had given him your address?

FANNY (*indignantly*). Not I, indeed! He didn't ask for it, or perhaps I might! Well, the next morning he called again, and the following morning, and the morning after that—in short, every morning—and as I was always in the drawing-room, of course quite by accident—

MRS. MAJOR. You naturally became quite intimate—familiar and chatty.

FANNY. *He* didn't. *I* did all the *chatting* part! Never did I see any one so timid, so bashful, as Boodle. When he *did* try to say something, there he'd stand stammering and stuttering and blushing like a school-girl! But although his tongue didn't say much, his *eyes* did!

MRS. MAJOR (*smiling*). And they said, "I love you?"

FANNY. Distinctly! Well, I thought to myself it's not a bit of use going on like this. It's quite evident the poor man wor-

ships the very ground I tread upon. So when he called next day, and I told him, in *tremulous accents*, of course, that I was going away, the effect was magical. First he turned pale, then red, then blue; then he let his hat fall, then his umbrella, then himself—on both his knees, at both my feet, and there, I believe, he would have remained till further notice, if I hadn't said to him, "Augustus"—his name is Augustus—"I won't pretend to misunderstand you. You love me! I am yours!"

MRS. MAJOR. What! Such an act of thoughtlessness, of indiscretion, on your part!

FANNY. Perhaps it was, but I know this: it quite cured him of his timidity; for when he once *did* begin, I never heard anybody's tongue rattle on at such a rate as his did—never!

MRS. MAJOR. And the result, I presume, was—

FANNY. That we both, then and there, exchanged vows of constancy and locks of hair! His is rather red, by-the-bye! But I see mamma coming!

MRS. MAJOR. Then I'll retire. Seeing us closeted together would only arouse her ridiculous jealousy.

FANNY. And I'll see if I can't find an opportunity to slip in a word about Augustus. In the mean time you'll keep my secret?

MRS. MAJOR. Religiously! for your sake (*going up*).

FANNY. And Boodle's.

MRS. MAJOR (*turning and smiling*). And Boodle's.

[*Exit at c.*]

Enter MRS. PELICAN at R. H.

MRS. P. Oh, here you are, Fanny!

FANNY. Yes, mamma! and quite alone.

MRS. P. *Now!* But you were not alone.

FANNY. No, dear Georgina was with me.

MRS. P. And "dear Georgina," no doubt, lost no opportunity of prejudicing you against your mother!

FANNY. Oh, mamma! (*reproachfully*).

MRS. P. But fortunately you will not long be exposed to her pernicious influence.

FANNY. Oh, mamma!

MRS. P. Bring a chair and sit down by me.

FANNY (*sitting down by MRS. PELICAN'S side—aside*). I wonder what's coming?

MRS. P. I have something serious to say to you, Fanny.

FANNY. So have I to you, mamma—*very* serious!

MRS. P. Indeed! In the mean time, as I happen to be your mother, and you, consequently, happen to be my daughter, perhaps you'll allow me to begin *first*?

FANNY. Certainly.

MRS. P. Then listen. Although you are still very young—

FANNY. Nineteen next birthday, mamma.

MRS. P. Don't interrupt me! Although you are still young, I have been reflecting a good deal lately on that all-important subject, your future settlement in life!

FANNY (*quickly*). So have I, mamma! (*Aside*.) I shall be able to get in a word presently about Augustus!

MRS. P. In other words, don't you consider it high time you thought of matrimony?

FANNY (*very quickly*). I *do*, mamma! I'm always thinking of it!

MRS. P. But of course it isn't likely *you* can have any one in your eye *yet*!

FANNY. I beg your pardon! I *have*!

MRS. P. (*severely*). What's that you say?

FANNY. That is—I mean—of course I hain't! (*Aside*.) It won't do to say anything about Augustus yet; I must keep him dark!

MRS. P. Then you have no positive antipathy to the married state?

FANNY. I should think not, indeed! (*very quickly*).

MRS. P. (*severely*). My dear, I'm really surprised to hear a

well-educated young lady express herself in such, I might almost say indelicate, terms. But to return; I need not say I would not encourage any candidate for your hand who was not deserving of you.

FANNY. Of course not, mamma! He *must* be worthy of such a treasure!

MRS. P. Tolerably young, and not absolutely ill-looking!

FANNY (*eagerly*). Certainly not! (*Aside.*) I call Augustus decidedly *good-looking*!

MRS. P. And in the possession of ample means.

FANNY (*aside*). Augustus has got ever so much already, besides two rich maiden aunts and an aged godmother!

MRS. P. All of which qualifications are, fortunately, in the possession of Sir Marmaduke Mangle!

FANNY. Sir Marmaduke Mangle? Lor, mamma, you can't mean that little old man we met at Brighton, with a bad cough, a wig, and a canary-colored complexion?

MRS. P. He's not old by any means, and is only *slightly* canary-colored after all! However, he has seen you, he admires you, and offers you his hand, his heart, his title, and his fortune!

FANNY. But I don't love *him*, mamma! I never *could* love him—even if I didn't love somebody else!

MRS. P. (*starting*). What's that I hear? You love somebody else?

FANNY. Yes, and one who loves *me*, and one I'm determined to marry, or die an old maid. There!

MRS. P. (*angrily*). Silence, miss!

FANNY (*impatiently*). I won't silence! If you think Sir Marmaduke such a very great catch, marry him yourself! I'll consent to it, and give you away into the bargain! It's quite evident you were never in love!

MRS. P. I beg your pardon! I *was*, intensely, with a youthful doctor! (*Aside.*) Poor Vicessimus! Ah! (*giving a long sigh*).

Nevertheless, I married your father—and we were not so *very* unhappy, considering! (*To FANNY, who is about to speak.*) Not another word! My mind is made up, so the sooner you make up *yours* to become Lady Mangle the better!

Enter MRS. MAJOR and MAJOR at c., followed by JOSEPH.

MRS. MAJOR. Nothing so simple, Joseph! Tell Mary to put up a bed for Miss Fanny in her mamma's room!

MRS. P. (*sharply*). What's that? Put up a bed in my room?

MRS. MAJOR. Yes! Why not?

MRS. P. Because I won't allow it!

MAJOR (*aside*). There they are, at it again!

FANNY. But why can't I have my own snug little room?

MRS. MAJOR. The fact is, I have made a work-room of it for myself; besides, Fanny's proper place is with her mother.

MRS. P. Quite out of the question! The slightest noise disturbs my sleep.

FANNY. But I sleep so very quietly, mamma—you'd scarcely hear me breathe; I don't, and as for snoring—

MRS. P. I won't hear another word.

MAJOR. But, hang it all, Fanny must sleep *somewhere*! She requires a horizontal position as much as other people.

MRS. P. Then let her find one—but not in *my* room!

MRS. MAJOR. I insist on my wishes being carried out.

FANNY (*aside to MAJOR*). Oh, brother Jeremiah, if I was only in your place just for five minutes!

MAJOR (*aside*). She's quite right! I'm master here after all, confound it! If I'm *not*, I ought to be; and if I ought to be, I *will* be, confound it! (*Aloud, and assuming an authoritative manner.*) My patience is exhausted! Anarchy has presided too long over my domestic hearth.

FANNY (*aside to him*). Confound it!

MAJOR. Confound it!

MRS. P.

MRS. MAJOR.

} Quite true!

MAJOR. And henceforth I'm determined to be master of my own house. (FANNY *whispers him.*) Confound it!

MAJOR. But there must be a mistress as well.

MRS. P. } Of course! Well (*anxiously*), decide between
MRS. MAJOR. } us.

MAJOR. That's what I'm going to do. (*Aside.*) It's really very awkward! My mother screams loudest, but my wife screams longest; besides, I only hear my mother in the day, whereas my wife—

MRS. P. (*to MAJOR*). Well? which of the two is to be mistress here?

MRS. MAJOR. Yes, which of the two?

MAJOR (*after a violent effort*). My wife! There! I've said it. (FANNY *whispers him.*) Confound it!

MRS. P. Ah! (*screaming and falling into a chair*).

MRS. MAJOR. Come, major, and as your reward you shall hear me issue my orders in such a style.

[*Exit at L. H., hurrying MAJOR with her, and calling, as she goes out, Joseph! Mary! Sophia!*]

MRS. P. (*suddenly starting up from her chair*). So! she—she's to be everybody, and I'm to be nobody! a cipher, a nonentity! Was there ever such ingratitude? I, who left my own home to live with them, without even waiting to be asked, to give them the benefit of my experience, to take upon myself the entire control of their domestic affairs—nay, even to carry my maternal affection so far as not to allow either of them to interfere in anything whatever!

FANNY (*aside*). Poor dear mamma! she doesn't see that's the very reason why everything went wrong.

MRS. P. But I'll forget them, I'll renounce them, I'll cast them off, I'll abandon them to their unhappy fate; and when you're comfortably married, dear, I'll come and live with *you* (*throwing her arms round FANNY, who tries to speak*). No thanks, I see you are literally bursting with gratitude; but I am

rewarded already! I feel it here—here! (*striking her breast, then flings her arms round FANNY again, and hurries out at R. H.*).

FANNY. Mercy on us! here's a pretty piece of business! Live with me when I am married! Poor Augustus! he little suspects what a rod there is in pickle for him! It's all Jeremiah's fault, and it's poor little I who am punished.

DOCTOR (*without*). In the parlor, is she? Very well!

FANNY. Surely that's dear Doctor Prettywell's voice!

Enter DOCTOR at c.

DOCTOR. Ah! my dear young friend, delighted to see you!

FANNY. Not more than I am to see you, doctor!

DOCTOR. But let me look at you. How we're grown! I declare we're quite a young woman!

FANNY. Yes, doctor.

DOCTOR. And a very pretty one, too!

FANNY. Yes, doctor.

DOCTOR (*looking intently at FANNY*). She's the very image of her mother as she *was* thirty years ago; the same soft blue eyes, before she took to spectacles, the same fairy form, before it filled out, the same alabaster brow, before the wrinkles set in!

FANNY (*aside*). How earnestly he looks at me! I hope I hain't fascinated *him* as well as Sir Marmaduke! (*Suddenly.*) Goodness me! what if *he* should be the "youthful doctor" mamma was speaking about? (*Doctor looks at her again and gives a loud sigh.*) What a sigh! It must be he. He may still have some lingering affection for her; the flame may not be *quite* burnt out; there may be a tiny spark left which a little gentle *blowing* may rekindle into a blaze. It isn't very likely; still, I may as well try what a little "blowing" may do.

DOCTOR. Well, now that your education is completed, and you've come home brimful of accomplishments, of course you'll go into society, and, like other young ladies, pick up a husband?

FANNY (*with affected indifference*). A husband? Not I, indeed! I've never even thought of such a thing! (*Aside.*) I had no idea I could fib so well! (*Aloud.*) No, doctor! I've too much regard for my own tranquillity, my own peace of mind!

DOCTOR. Hoity-toity! Who's been putting such nonsense into your head?

FANNY. Why, you yourself never ventured on matrimony!

DOCTOR. No! because I—I— Heigh-ho! (*giving a loud sigh*).

FANNY (*aside, and smiling*). The "tiny spark" is gradually getting into a blaze! I did quite right in trying the effect of a little "blowing!" (*Aloud.*) Besides, I have come to the conclusion, from considerable personal experience, that the male sex in general—I mean, taken in a lump—is no better than it should be.

DOCTOR (*laughing*). Indeed!

FANNY. I'm sorry to say they're a false, fickle, perfidious lot! They gain a poor confiding woman's heart only to trifle with it and trample on it! Poor dear mamma! I am no longer surprised at your little fits of temper—at your discontent with everything and everybody—now that I know the sad circumstances which blighted your youth and cast a gloom over your after-life! (*with affected pathos*).

DOCTOR (*aside*). What do I hear? (*Aloud, and anxiously.*) Has your mother, then, revealed?

FANNY. No; but she might just as well, because I was sure to find it out.

DOCTOR. Find out *what*?

FANNY. A lot of things! Ah, doctor! if you had only heard her sigh as I have!

DOCTOR. Sigh?

FANNY. Yes; but that's not all. Poor mamma! You'd hardly believe the number of pearly drops I've seen fall from her poor eyes into her teacup.

DOCTOR. Pearly drops?

FANNY. But *that's* not all! (*In a very mysterious manner.*) I

once heard her, when she little thought I was listening, say, in faltering accents, "Ah! if he had really loved me, would he not have declared his passion when I became a widow?"

DOCTOR. Did she? (*Aside.*) She loves me still! Dear Cleopatra!

FANNY. Who can she mean? I should so like to know. Perhaps, doctor, you'll help me to find out; but here she comes (*looking towards c.* DOCTOR *gives a violent start*). Why, what's the matter?

DOCTOR. Nothing; only a sort of a kind of a—of a—I scarcely know whether I am standing on my head or my heels!

FANNY. On your head, of course!

DOCTOR. I thought so.

MRS. P. (*heard without*). Joseph! Joseph!

DOCTOR (*aside*). I can't meet her yet. The agitation—the trepidation—the perturbation—the—

FANNY. Perhaps you'd better retire, doctor; (*aside*) or else he'll be flopping down on his knees to mamma before I've prepared her for the shock!

Enter MRS. PELICAN at R. H., followed by JOSEPH.

MRS. P. Joseph, inform your master that I shall dine in my own apartment.

[JOSEPH bows and goes out R. H. DOCTOR meets MRS. PELICAN as she comes down—looks tenderly at her—clasps his hands, and gives a deep sigh; then hurries up—stops again at c.—turns—gives her another tender look—another deep sigh, and hurries out at c.]

MRS. P. (*watching DOCTOR in astonishment*). Why, what's the matter with the man?

FANNY (*aside*). It's *your* turn now, mamma! You wanted to get a husband for *me*; so as one good turn deserves another, I'll see if I can't find one for *you*!

MRS. P. (*aside*). I must find out who this "girlish fancy" of hers is. (*Aloud.*) Come here, Fanny. Of course *your* happiness is all I desire!

FANNY. And it's all *I* desire too, mamma!

MRS. P. Then have confidence in your mother—your *only* mother! Tell me the name of the young man who has won your affections.

FANNY. You asked me if I had any one in my eye, and I said I *had*; but I didn't tell you he was a *young* man. The fact is, mamma, I've been so often told that I am so giddy, so thoughtless, so flighty, that I selected some one of *maturer* years; he would give me the benefit of his experience—his advice—his—his—

MRS. P. Maturer years?

FANNY. Yes! Besides, he has known me so long!—ever since I was a tiny little mite. He used to dandle me on his knee, and buy me dolls and toys and sweeties and hardbake and eacam-pane, and all that sort of thing!

MRS. P. (*aside*): Known her for years! (*Suddenly.*) Mercy on us! can she be alluding to "Vicessimus?"

FANNY. But, ma dear, that which attracted more than all was the respectful, I may say the *affectionate*, terms in which he always speaks of *you*.

MRS. P. Does he? (*Aside.*) Poor fluttering heart, be still! Dear Vicessimus! He hain't, then, quite forgot his Cleopatra! (*Aloud.*) But is DOCTOR PRETTYWELL—for it surely must be *he* to whom your remarks apply—

FANNY. Yes, mamma.

MRS. P. (*aside*). I thought so. (*Aloud.*) Is he aware of your somewhat foolish partiality?

FANNY. I think so. He'll tell you why! Whenever he used to call, and we happened to be sitting side by side—I mean you and I, mamma—I noticed that he always kept his eye fixed on us, and it always made me blush so.

MRS. P. (*aside*). Poor simple child. She flatters herself that it was on *her* that Vicessimus's enamoured glances were riveted.

FANNY. And don't you recollect the last time he took us to the theatre, how attentive, how polite he was to you?

MRS. P. Yes. I remember he brought me three oranges and an ounce of acidulated drops into our box.

FANNY. And if you only had heard him just now, when I told him how shamefully you had been treated here! "What!" he exclaimed, turning quite red in the face and tearing his hair out in handfuls. "What! Dare to offer such an affront to so good, so amiable, so excellent a woman—a woman born to command, born to be beloved!"

MRS. P. Did he?

Enter JOSEPH at R. H.

JOSEPH. Please, ma'am—and wishes to know if you are disengaged?

MRS. P. I'll come to him. (*Exit JOSEPH R. H.*) How shall I meet him? how conceal my feelings? Once more, poor little fluttering heart, be still! (*Aside, and looking at FANNY*). Poor Fanny! I shall be sorry to cut her out; but constancy like Vicessimus's deserves, and shall have, its reward!

[*Exit at R. H.*

FANNY. There! I flatter myself I've managed that rather cleverly. I've given tranquillity to Jeremiah, happiness to Georgina; I've got mamma a husband, and— But stop a bit! who's to get one for *me*? Oh dear, dear! I haven't half done yet!

Enter MRS. MAJOR very hurriedly at c.

MRS. MAJOR. Oh! what shall I do? what shall I do?

FANNY. Georgina dear, what's the matter?

MRS. MAJOR. Oh, Fanny, such an event! I quite forgot to tell you that a person—I can't call him a gentleman—has been following me about everywhere in the most persevering, the most audacious manner, for the last month!

FANNY. What a contrast to Augustus!

MRS. MAJOR. And at last he has actually had the effrontery to write to me. A groom called just now with a letter, and was in the act of giving it to Mary, with strict injunctions to deliver it to me, and to me only, when my husband suddenly appeared and snatched the letter out of his hand.

FANNY (*aside*). Something more for me to do! I shall never get my work done here!

MRS. MAJOR. He must have read the letter by this time! Oh, what, what will he think of me? But here he comes! and what a dreadful temper he looks in!

Enter MAJOR hurriedly at c., looking very wild and agitated, a letter in his hand; comes forward.

MAJOR (*folding his arms and assuming a tragic attitude*). So, madam; I repeat "So, madam!" You may tremble at the sight of your hitherto too confiding but now indignant husband!

MRS. MAJOR. But, Jeremiah dear—

MAJOR. Don't "Jeremiah dear" me! Are you aware, unhappy woman, that I might give you in charge to the police? No, I don't mean that—that I might insist on a separation? or call your ignoble accomplice out and shoot him?—which I *would* do, if I were sure he wouldn't shoot *me*! But no! I prefer to expose, to unmask you!

Enter MRS. PELICAN hastily at c., followed by DOCTOR.

MRS. P. What is all this disturbance about? What has happened?

MAJOR. You've arrived just in time! I only wish the entire universe were assembled in this breakfast-room to hear me!

MRS. MAJOR (*shrugging her shoulders*). Pshaw! they could only laugh at your absurd suspicions!

MAJOR. Suspicions? Come, I like that, when I have the proofs

—you hear, madam, the proofs of your misconduct!—this letter, madam! this letter! (*producing letter and flourishing it*).

MRS. P. A letter!

MAJOR. Yes! listen, and shudder! (*taking letter out of envelope, which he lets fall on stage, then reading in an impressive tone*). “Star of my life, idol of my heart!” That’s pretty well to begin with! (*Reading again.*) “Ever since the God of Love first presented you to my enraptured orbs!” (*Aside.*) What does the fellow mean by “orbs?” (*Reading again.*) “I have loved you” —point of admiration; here it is, there’s no mistake about the point of admiration! (*showing letter to MRS. P. and DOCTOR*). But that’s not all! (*Reads again.*) “In order to bask in your divine presence, I am prepared to sweep every obstacle from my path.” There’s a sanguinary ruffian! Of course I’m one of the obstacles to be swept away!

MRS. P. And how is the letter signed?

MAJOR. There is no signature!

FANNY (*aside*). That’s fortunate! (*picking up the envelope unseen and putting it in her pocket*).

MAJOR (*to MRS. MAJOR*). Now, madam, what have you to say?

MRS. MAJOR. Simply this, that I am more than ever indignant at your preposterous and odious suspicions.

FANNY (*suddenly confronting MAJOR*). So am I! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Jeremiah! and so ought you, mamma, and so ought everybody! And what’s more, I’m determined that poor, dear, innocent Georgina shall be no longer unjustly accused!

MRS. P. }
MAJOR. } What’s that?

FANNY. I dare say I shall be scolded, but I’m used to that; in fact, I rather like it; and after all it was sure to be found out sooner or later; in a word—that letter—

MRS. P. Well?

FANNY. Was intended for *me*!

MRS. MAJOR (*aside to her*). Fanny!

FANNY (*aside to her*). Hush! I'm engaged in a little business of *my own* now!

MRS. P. For you?

FANNY. Yes! although I particularly told him not to write to me.

MRS. P. Told him? Told *who*?

FANNY. Augustus!

MRS. P. Who's Augustus?

FANNY. *My* Augustus, of course!

MRS. MAJOR. I can confirm Fanny's words, having been in possession of the whole particulars for the last hour.

MAJOR. Have you? Then, perhaps, you can furnish us with Augustus's other name—if he's got one (*satirically*).

MRS. MAJOR. Certainly—Noodle.

FANNY (*very quickly*). No—Boodle!

DOCTOR. Augustus Boodle? Let me see! of course! I first met him at Cheltenham!

FANNY. So did I.

DOCTOR. He was only a lad then, and was going into the army—to distinguish himself, as he said.

FANNY. I can't say whether he did distinguish *himself*, but I know that he very soon distinguished *me*!

DOCTOR. The Boodles of Gloucestershire. There's not a more respected family in the county! Come, my dear Mrs. Pelican, if you'll take my advice, you'll not hesitate in accepting Augustus Noodle—I mean Boodle—as a son-in-law!

MRS. P. Well, I'll think the matter over, and then, perhaps, I may say yes.

FANNY (*coaxingly*). Suppose you say yes first, mamma, and think the matter over afterwards?

MRS. P. (*ironically*). But, Fanny, what about a certain party of "*maturer years*," on whose *experience* you proposed to rely?

FANNY. Let me ask you, mamma, would it have been dutiful in a daughter to deprive her mother of the object of her early affection?

MAJOR. What's that? "Early affection!"—"object!"

MRS. P. Yes; there stands the object (*pointing to DOCTOR*). In a word, I have been induced to accept the hand of Doctor Prettywell, from his many amiable qualities and (*aside to DOCTOR*) his *constancy*. Here, Vicessimus (*holding her hand out to him*).

DOCTOR. Thanks, Cleopatra (*taking her hand and kissing it*).

MAJOR (*very timidly to MRS. MAJOR*). Georgina, can you forgive your Jeremiah? I don't know how I may *look*, but you've no idea how *small* I feel.

MRS. MAJOR. This once I do! but remember, this once *only*. There (*giving her hand to MAJOR*).

MAJOR. Then, in spite of all petty domestic discords, everybody is happy at last.

FANNY. Which only proves the truth of the old adage, that "After a storm comes a calm."

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

EXPRESS!

A Railway Romance, in One Compartment.

(Adapted from the French.)

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

A LADY.

A GENTLEMAN.

A RAILWAY GUARD.

[The action is supposed to take place in a first-class railway-carriage, travelling on a certain line between a certain place and another certain place.]

SCENE.—*A plain interior, supposed to represent a compartment in a first-class railway-carriage; door in flat at C.—the entrance—four easy-chairs placed two and two opposite the others, representing the seats—on the second chair at L. H. an open newspaper.*

The actor playing the part of the gentleman enters at door C. in light overcoat, with travelling-bag, hat-box, and railway-rug over his arm; he places the bag, hat-box, and rug on first chair, L. H., and advances, cap in hand, and, after sundry bows, proceeds to explain the scene to the audience. Ladies and gentlemen: The little piece we are about to present to you is supposed to take place in a first-class compartment of a railway-carriage, travelling express from—from—Plymouth to London; shall we say Plymouth to London?—very well—Plymouth to London. You will also be good enough to see in the humble individual who is now addressing you, a deputy-assistant-deputy-inspector of Government prisons, returning from an official visit to that well-known and, judging from the constant stream of applications for admission, highly popular convict establishment at—at—Dart-

mouth; shall we say Dartmouth?—be it so, we'll say Dartmouth! Our first idea, in order to impart a greater reality to the situation, was to place before you a regular train with locomotive, etc., etc., all complete, and for this purpose we applied to a certain railway company for the loan of one; but the secretary, in reply, said that the only materials he could offer us were cattle-trucks and coal-wagons, all the passenger rolling-stock being in requisition, owing to the unusual number they had smashed up during the year. He certainly offered us the use of an engine, but at the same time candidly gave us to understand that it was a little bit rusty, and wouldn't stand the slightest pressure; he further added that if the knob of the steam-whistle *should* happen to knock out the front teeth of any of the audience, we were not to blame *him* if we had a few compensation actions to sustain!—and so on! Altogether the alternative was so dismal that we decided on sacrificing a flaming line in our play-bill about "flashing express," "real steam," "genuine foot-warmers," which we had composed for the occasion, and to fall back upon the best scene that our stage-carpenter and property-man could prepare for us.

We must, therefore, ask you to bring your imaginations to our aid, and to fancy you see in that door and in these four easy-chairs the interior of a first-class compartment of a railway-carriage, and to imagine further that I have passed the night in one of them, and am at the present moment still enjoying a profound sleep.

And now, ladies and gentlemen, permit me to enter into my part, to seat myself in the snugger corner I can find, and to resume my interrupted nap! (*makes a profound bow to audience, goes up stage, and seats himself on the first chair, L. H.; puts on his travelling-cap, wraps himself up in the railway-rug, after having placed on the second chair, L., his travelling-bag, a railway guide, and a paper-knife; he then yawns once or twice, then falls asleep, and after a time snores gently. Loud noise of train arriving, with*

steam-engine, railway-bell, and whistle, as the train is supposed to arrive and gradually to stop).

GUARD (*heard without*). Reading! Change here for Guildford, Dorking, Reigate, Redhill!

VOICE (*without*). Guard, how long do we stop here?

GUARD (*without*). Ten minutes, sir! (*Cries of "Reading; change here," etc., etc., etc., repeated, and gradually diminishing, accompanied by noise of slamming doors, etc.*)

GENTLEMAN (*starting from his sleep*). What's that? Who speaks of stopping? I wonder what the time is? (*Looks at watch.*) Seven o'clock? (*Opens door and looks out.*) Broad daylight, I declare (*closing door again*); then I must have slept the best part of the night! I don't even remember my travelling companion getting out; he seems to have forgotten his newspaper (*taking up paper from chair*). Not a very talkative fellow; in fact, he never opened his mouth, except to put something into it—principally Abernethys and peppermint-drops. By Jove, his *Daily News* is full of crumbs and caraways now!—a regular pantry!

GUARD (*again heard without*). Reading! Ten minutes to stop!

GENTLEMAN. Ten minutes to stop? Then I may as well get out and stretch my legs a bit (*rises, puts railway-rug, guide, and travelling-bag on his seat, and goes to door c.; then calls*). Guard, whereabouts is the refreshment-bar?

GUARD (*without*). This way, sir (*GENTLEMAN goes out at door c. towards R. H.—short pause*).

The LADY looks in at c. and stops; then enters with two small parcels and a bonnet-box.

LADY. Yes; all things considered, I decidedly prefer this carriage to the ladies' compartment, where there's only room for one, and then what should I do with my packages? Besides, ladies are not so remarkably agreeable among themselves; while here—(*looking about her*). Let me see, which corner shall I take? I think this will do (*indicating the seat which the GENTLEMAN has*

just left); one's face to the engine, and not so likely to be troubled by people getting in and out; yes, this will do very well indeed! (*during this she removes the GENTLEMAN's effects from first chair L. H. to the opposite chair at R.*) And after all, provided one has a gentleman for a travelling companion, a host of these little difficulties soon disappear! (*Seats herself on first chair L. H.*). There! I shall do very nicely here—very nicely indeed! (*Here the GENTLEMAN appears outside at door C.*) Some one's coming! one of the opposite sex! I *hope* a gentleman. Suppose I pretend to be asleep? I will! I'll shut my eyes, and then I shall be able to judge of his appearance! (*wraps herself up so as to conceal her face, and pretends to be asleep*).

GENTLEMAN (*entering at door and stamping his feet*). I feel all the better! Thanks to a glass of sherry and half a dozen rapid turns up and down the platform, the circulation is re-established; so now for another dose of pins and needles. Holloa! what's this?—my seat taken, and all my things bundled away anyhow on another seat! Well, of all the cool proceedings— (*To the LADY.*) I beg pardon, madam, but— Asleep? Rather a sudden attack of drowsiness, considering she can't have been here more than five minutes! However, she's a lady—at least she looks like one, though she *is* such a cool hand, and I can't be so ungallant as to turn her out, especially as she looks so snug and comfortable! I must take another corner! (*He seats himself on second chair at L. H., partly turning his back to the LADY.*)

LADY (*aside and partly uncovering her face*). I knew these little difficulties would soon arrange themselves! (*wraps herself up as before*).

GENTLEMAN (*fidgeting about in his seat*). I was much more comfortable in my own seat. There was a nice hollow for one's back there; but here there's a confounded lump that's positively painful! I must confess I have found that women in general haven't the slightest hesitation in taking advantage of one if they possibly can. Here's an instance; just as I had got used to my

seat, in comes one of the weaker sex and turns me out bag and baggage! They know their power, and abuse it: too bad! Now (*looking aside at LADY*) if my neighbor were but young—and pretty into the bargain—but no; catch a woman wrapping herself up like that when she is young (*gaping*) and pretty! (*His head nods once or twice, and he falls asleep.*)

GUARD (*without*). Take your seats! Any more going on?

LADY (*cautiously peeping at GENTLEMAN, then uncovering, and aside*). So it seems I shall have no other travelling companion but this gentleman! (*Here loud railway-whistle heard, and noise of train starting.*) We're off. (*Looking at GENTLEMAN again.*) I must say he appears to be perfectly harmless and inoffensive. (*GENTLEMAN snores.*) What did he say? (*A louder snore from GENTLEMAN.*) Well, if that's a specimen of his conversation, it isn't likely to compromise one! (*Another snore.*) I may as well go to sleep myself, and then, perhaps, I may be able to join in the conversation too! (*Wraps herself up, but this time allows her face to remain uncovered; closes her eyes; pause.*)

GENTLEMAN (*suddenly waking and shifting his position*). Decidedly, of all the uncomfortable seats this is the most uncomfortable. I *should* like to know what they stuff their cushions with; I feel as if I'd got a quartern loaf at my back! (*Taking a rapid glance at LADY, then, in a savage tone.*) She seems comfortable enough! How absurd—how ridiculous of me not to have demanded—not to have in-sis-ted. (*Looking again at LADY.*) By Jove, she is young! and by no means bad-looking! Bad-looking! she's pretty—*very* pretty—*excessively* pretty! and to think I should have actually gone to sleep in her presence! One never knows what one does in one's sleep; luckily, I never snore; that's one comfort! (*Takes off his travelling-cap, arranges his hair, cravat, etc.*) How soundly she sleeps—if she *does* sleep! (*in doubt*). When one is *really* asleep—I mean *fast* asleep—it isn't usual to wear a smile on one's face; on the contrary, one's face generally gets ugly! I'll be bound that just now I was positively hideous!

(*He coughs loudly, the LADY moves.*) She wakes! (*Suddenly and loudly.*) What a beautiful country! what a lovely green on those meadows! (*LADY keeps silence.*) I'll try again! (*Still louder.*) How unusually beautiful are the autumn tints, especially so early in the spring! (*Pause; aside.*) No response? She must have taken a sleeping draught!

LADY (*pretending to wake*). A thousand pardons, sir; did you speak?

GENTLEMAN. I was merely observing what a lovely meadow on those greens! I mean (*another pause*) I hear the harvest is likely to be a plentiful one, although I'm told that turnips are backward; I haven't heard anything about carrots.

LADY (*in an indifferent tone*). I beg pardon; were you speaking to me? (*Aside.*) Some gentleman farmer, evidently.

GENTLEMAN (*nettled, and imitating her—aside*). "Were you speaking to me?" I rather think I *was* speaking to her! Holloa! she's off to sleep again! No one can call *her* particularly wide-awake. Well, since she's off into land of dreams again, I don't see why I shouldn't indulge in a cigarette (*takes out some cigarette papers, tobacco pouch, spreads them on his knees and proceeds to make a cigarette; then stops*). Stop, though! I can't smoke without first asking her permission; of course not! (*Aloud, and coughing.*) Ahem! (*Watching her.*) Sound as a top! Try again! (*Coughing louder.*) Ahem! (*The LADY opens her eyes and moves impatiently—aside.*) That did it!

GENTLEMAN (*apologetically*). My cough is rather troublesome, ma'am.

LADY. I find it so—very!

GENTLEMAN (*aside*). Well! that's about the rudest thing I've heard for some time! (*Aloud.*) I was about to ask you whether you object to the smell of tobacco?

LADY. Oh, not at all, sir!

GENTLEMAN. Thank you! (*proceeds to make his cigarette, and about to light it*).

LADY. I mean, not till it's lighted!

GENTLEMAN. Oh, I see; and then you do?

LADY. Very much, indeed!

GENTLEMAN. Even when you are asleep? (*in an insinuating tone*).

LADY (*slowly and decisively*). Whether I am awake or asleep, sir!

GENTLEMAN (*aside*). Now that's what I call selfish—just as if the smoke *could* get up her nose when her eyes are shut! (*putting away his smoking apparatus. Aside*). I must say I *have* met more agreeable young ladies—*very much* more agreeable—in fact, I may say I never remember meeting one *less* agreeable. Well, I sha'n't disturb the "Sleeping Beauty" again in a hurry. Now for another nap! (*sulkily crams smoking apparatus into his pocket, draws his cap very much over his head, stands up, folds himself up in his rug, and then flounces down on his seat again, partially turning his back to the LADY*).

LADY. (*slowly turning her head and taking a glance at GENTLEMAN*). Well, I must confess he put away his smoking apparatus with a very good grace! (*Sees newspaper.*) Some one has left a newspaper! (*Taking newspaper and reading.*) Um, um! *Plymouth Gazette*. "Foreign News," "Paris Fashions," "Early-Strawberries." What's this? "Escape of a convict. We learn that Benjamin Burshaw, a criminal of the most desperate character, effected his escape from Dartmoor prison yesterday. The following is his description: Age, not exactly known; eyes, nothing peculiar; wears a long black beard—has probably cut it off; walks slightly lame with one leg, uncertain which; supposed to have directed his steps towards London, or in some other direction." Dear me! it is just possible he may be in this very train! (*looking aside at the GENTLEMAN, then reading again*). "Middle height" (*looking again at GENTLEMAN*); "inclined to be stout" (*another look at GENTLEMAN*); he's so rolled up in his rug one can't judge! (*Reads again.*) "Slightly bald, with a scar on left

side of forehead" (*here the GENTLEMAN in his sleep hastily pulls his travelling-cap over his forehead; the LADY gives a sudden start, and recoils as far as possible from the GENTLEMAN*). How very suddenly he pulled his cap over his forehead—and the left side of it too! Pshaw! how foolish, how absurd of me! (*Reads paper again, and then closes her eyes once more.*)

GENTLEMAN (*rousing himself*). It's no use! I can't get a wink of sleep, except by fits and starts—principally starts! (*Looking at LADY.*) Still asleep! and no book to read except this "Illustrated Guide through England and Wales." However, *that's* better than "Bradshaw." (*During above he has taken a book out of his bag, and cuts the leaves with a paper-knife; turns over leaves.*) What's this? (*Reads.*) "Maidenhead. It was in the neighborhood of this picturesque town that the famous Dick Turpin—" (*Here the LADY and GENTLEMAN are suddenly thrown forward.*)

LADY (*alarmed*). What a shock! Has anything happened?

GENTLEMAN (*indifferently*). Nothing of consequence! merely the train passing over something—or somebody!

LADY (*aside*). Rather an unfeeling remark! (*Aloud.*) Can you tell me where we are, sir? I am quite a stranger to this line.

GENTLEMAN. We *should* be near Slough. You may not be aware, madam, that it was here that—(*taking a peep aside at his book*)—"that the famous Dick Turpin"—you've heard of Dick Turpin, of course—the celebrated highwayman? (*LADY shakes her head.*) Well, it was here that he was in the habit of spending his leisure hours—I mean when he'd nothing better to do—in—in (*taking another peep at book*)—"in planting potatoes!"—Poor Dick! my great-grandfather saw him hanged!

LADY (*shocked*). Hanged?

GENTLEMAN. Yes—I forget exactly what for—something about putting an old lady on the kitchen fire!

LADY (*indignantly*). Surely, never was a fate more richly deserved!

GENTLEMAN. On the contrary, she was quite a respectable sort of old body!

LADY (*aloud, and in a satirical tone*). Thanks, sir, for your kind and *interesting* information!

GENTLEMAN (*modestly*). Don't mention it, I beg!

LADY (*aside*). A newspaper correspondent, perhaps! I prefer that to a farmer!

GENTLEMAN (*after a short pause*). I find the sun rather too warm on this side of the carriage, madam—will it inconvenience you if I take this seat? (*indicating first chair at R.*).

LADY. Not in the least! Indeed, I should have the less right to object, as I am afraid I have appropriated *yours*; and by far the more comfortable one, I suspect!

GENTLEMAN. You simply foresaw that I should offer it to you, madam!

LADY. Oh, sir! (*bowing*).

GENTLEMAN. Oh, madam! (*bowing; he removes things from where the LADY had placed them, and seats himself opposite to her*).

LADY (*aside*). Really a very pleasant, agreeable fellow!

GENTLEMAN (*aside*). Her full face is even better than her profile! (*Aloud, and in a sentimental tone.*) Ah, madam! would it were in my power to prolong this pleasant journey—this delightful *tête-à-tête*!

LADY (*with dignity*). Sir!

GENTLEMAN (*aside*). That's no go! (*Aloud.*) I mean, madam, that one seems to travel *too* fast nowadays! (*LADY expresses surprise.*) In fact, we're *all* too fast!

LADY (*severely*). Sir!

GENTLEMAN (*aside*). *That's* no go! (*Aloud.*) We've only to contrast the present with the time when the wife of one of our ancient kings traversed the whole of England by easy stages of five miles a day!

LADY. Of whom do you speak?

GENTLEMAN. Of—of— (*Aside.*) Hang me if I know! (*Aloud.*)

Of Tabitha—I mean Elgitha, the wife of—Edmund—Sobersides—I should say Ironsides! But without going quite so far back, madam, I confess I often regret the days of those heavy old stage-coaches called “High-flyers,” “Eclipses,” and “Rockets.”

LADY (*smiling*). Because they went so slowly?

GENTLEMAN. Precisely. Still, it had its advantages—it gave one an opportunity to make the acquaintance of one's travelling companions—to establish a friendly feeling—perhaps one of a more tender nature! (*with a tender look at the LADY*).

LADY (*with a stare of astonishment*). Sir!

GENTLEMAN (*aside*). It's no use. I won't try any more! (*Aloud, and in a more colloquial tone.*) Besides, in a stage-coach there was always the chance of one of those little adventures that so often happened on the road!

LADY. You mean attacks by highwaymen, such as your friend Mr.—Turpin—who had a weakness for putting respectable old ladies on the kitchen fire? (*smiling satirically—then, changing her tone*). I remember myself a certain event which happened some five or six years ago when we were travelling.

GENTLEMAN. *We?* You and your pa and ma, probably?

LADY. My husband and I!

GENTLEMAN. Husband? you are married, ma'am! actually, positively married?

LADY. Alas, sir! (*sighing*).

GENTLEMAN (*aside*). I see! an unhappy union!—an ill-assorted match—poor soul! (*Aloud.*) Ah, madam, you are not the only one of your too confiding sex who have found marriage a bed of roses—I mean, of nettles, instead of one of nettles—I mean roses!

LADY. But, sir—you mistake—alas, sir, I am a widow!

GENTLEMAN. A widow? I'm delighted to hear it! No, I'm not! of course not! I deeply sympathize with you—as I always do with widows—I know what it is myself. But you mustn't give way—you'll get used to it in time—like the eels—no, not

like the eels—but you were about to mention some adventure which happened to you while travelling with—the late lamented. (*Noise heard of train gradually stopping—engine, railway-bell, whistle, etc.*)

VOICE (*outside, gradually approaching*). “Slough! Slough! change for Windsor; all tickets ready.”

GENTLEMAN (*angrily*). All tickets ready! these railway companies are perfectly absurd, with their mania for examining tickets! (*feeling in his pocket*).

LADY (*smiling*). Another advantage of the good old coaching days!

GENTLEMAN. Yes, quite so! (*feeling again in his pockets, one after the other*). Ah! here it is—no, it isn’t—how very odd; now I’ve got it—no, I haven’t! (*diving in his pockets again*).

LADY. I’m afraid you’ve lost your ticket, sir.

GENTLEMAN. Oh no! I haven’t lost it—only I can’t find it!

LADY. You may have dropped it? (*looking about on floor*).

GENTLEMAN. Pray don’t trouble yourself; I shall be sure to find it—(*aside*) as soon as I’ve paid for another! (*Aloud.*) I’ll just speak to the station-master. Excuse me a moment? (*LADY bows, GENTLEMAN exit at C., and disappears towards L. H.*)

LADY. Poor fellow! no wonder he dislikes railways if he’s in the habit of losing his ticket every time he travels!

GUARD *appears at door c.*

GUARD (*to LADY*). Ticket, please, ma’am? (*Takes ticket, and returns it to LADY.*) Thank you, ma’am. (*Seeing the GENTLEMAN’S bag, etc., on seat.*) These things belong to you, ma’am?

LADY. Oh no!

GUARD. Has any one left this carriage?

LADY. Yes! a gentleman—not a minute ago.

GUARD (*sulkily*). How can I examine people’s tickets when they get out at every station?

LADY. He fancies he has lost his ticket.

GUARD (*suspiciously*). Lost his ticket?—what a pity! (*Aside*.) That's an old dodge! (*Aloud*.) Is the gentleman one of your party, ma'am?

LADY. Oh dear no! only so far as we are journeying in the same compartment.

GUARD (*examining the GENTLEMAN'S bag*). No name on his travelling-bag—that's queer! We're expected to keep both eyes open on this line, ma'am—only yesterday we nabbed a desperate bank forger at this very station; and we're on the lookout for an escaped convict to-day!

LADY (*aside*). An escaped convict? that dreadful Mr. Burkshaw, no doubt? Not a very cheerful subject of conversation—I'm really getting quite nervous! (*collecting her packages and rising*).

GUARD. Going to get out, ma'am?

LADY. Yes, I should prefer the ladies' compartment.

GUARD. No room there, ma'am; eight of 'em already, besides babies!

LADY. I may get into another carriage, I presume?

GUARD. Certainly, ma'am. Good-day, ma'am (*goes out at door*).

LADY. Stop! stop! Help me out! Guard! guard! (*calling*).

GUARD (*outside*). Can't stop now, ma'am. Train just going on.

LADY. This is really too bad! Can't even change carriages on this line, which seems to be especially patronized by the criminal classes! But pshaw! I'm alarming myself unnecessarily. Is it likely that this gentleman—and he *is* a gentleman—who seems to be on intimate terms with the wife of Edmund Ironsides—can possibly have any connection with— How absurd of me! I really ought to be ashamed of myself. (*Seeing the paper-knife which the GENTLEMAN has left on seat*.) What a strange-looking paper-knife—quite a formidable weapon! Is it a paper-knife? it looks more like a stiletto! (*Taking up paper-knife very carefully between her finger and thumb, and then quickly dropping it again*). Such an instrument as that was never made to cut leaves! It looks much adapted to— (*Shuddering*.) How ridiculous of me!

My silly fears are running away with me again. Ha, ha, ha! (*forcing a laugh*).

GUARD (*without*). Take your seats!

GENTLEMAN *hurries in at c.* The LADY suddenly stops laughing, and gets as far as she can into her corner.

GENTLEMAN. I've found my ticket! I knew I should the moment I bought another. (*Takes his seat. To the LADY*). Where do you suppose it was?—you'll never guess. In my purse, where I always put my tickets! Ha, ha, ha!

LADY (*aside*). He *had* a ticket, then?

GENTLEMAN. It is very kind of you to interest yourself in the misfortunes of a stranger (*bowing*).

LADY. Is it not natural?

GENTLEMAN. It seems to be so to *you*, madam (*bowing again and moving a little towards LADY, who retreats*).

LADY (*aside*). If I could only induce him to remove his travelling-cap—not that I should discover the slightest scar on *his* forehead—I should then be completely reassured. (*Suddenly*.) Pardon me—is not that a friend of yours bowing to you on the other platform? (*indicating the audience*).

GENTLEMAN. Bowing to me? where? (*putting his hand to his cap*).

LADY (*pointing*). There! (*Aside.*) Now for it!

GENTLEMAN (*lowering his hand again without removing his cap*). No, ma'am, I don't know him; besides, he's not bowing to me.

LADY (*aside*). That's a failure!

GENTLEMAN. Holloa! Somebody's been moving my things!

LADY. Yes, the guard!—he seemed curious—I might say *anxious*—to ascertain if your name was on your travelling-bag!

GENTLEMAN. Very inquisitive of him! Why should I make my name public property?—there may be reasons why I should *not*!—pressing reasons! You can understand that, madam?

LADY. Y—es! I'm afraid I can—I mean, of course I can!

GENTLEMAN. But, as I was saying, the interest you have so kindly taken in me—a perfect stranger—

LADY (*very quickly*). Not at all, sir; on the contrary! No—that is—

GENTLEMAN. Permit me to continue. That interest, I repeat, comes naturally to *you*, blessed, as I'm sure you are, with so sweet, so gentle, so affectionate a disposition.

LADY (*very quickly*). Quite the reverse, I assure you, sir—I've a dreadful temper!

GENTLEMAN. Again: that charming hand is not less characteristic; it requires but one glance at those delicately tapered fingers— (*About to take her hand; LADY hastily withdraws it.*)

LADY (*aside*). I do believe the man's going to make love to me!

GENTLEMAN. But stay: I see one line here that is singularly prominent; permit me (*taking LADY's hand*).

LADY (*aside*). I'm quite at his mercy! Not the slightest use my screaming!

GENTLEMAN (*looking at her hand*). Yes, a very sudden intersection, threatening, I fear, some personal danger.

LADY (*alarmed*). Yes, very likely! (*Aside.*) How intently he fixes his eyes on my diamond ring!

GENTLEMAN. But were you not saying that you had once been exposed to some peril in travelling?

LADY. Yes; but I was not *alone* then.

GENTLEMAN. The "late lamented," I presume?

LADY. Yes; we were attacked by robbers in crossing the Pyrenees! (*Very quickly.*) Not that I particularly object to robbers! In fact, I rather like them! (*Aside.*) I may as well try what a little flattery will do.

GENTLEMAN (*still holding her hand*). You have a remarkably fine diamond here, madam!

LADY. Yes, a very good *imitation*, isn't it?

GENTLEMAN. Excuse me. I cannot mistake a diamond—no, no; I've had too many pass through my hands to do that!

LADY (*aside*). I'm afraid he has!

GENTLEMAN. And yet there's a flaw in it—if you'll allow me, I'll point it out to you. (*Looking about, then suddenly taking up the paper-knife; the LADY screams.*) I'm afraid I alarmed you!

LADY (*trying to be calm*). Oh dear no! and if you've quite done examining my hand—

GENTLEMAN. Quite, madam! (*releasing her hand*).

LADY. And you detect no further threatening of—personal danger?

GENTLEMAN. None whatever!

LADY. Then you are a believer in spiritualism and phrenology, and all that sort of thing?

GENTLEMAN. Certainly I am! May I ask, madam, if you have ever examined the head of a criminal?

LADY (*shocked*). Never, sir!

GENTLEMAN. Perhaps you have never even been brought into personal contact with one?

LADY. Certainly not, sir; though I'm sure I should feel the greatest pity for him—I should, indeed! (*in a commiserating tone*).

GENTLEMAN. Understand me; I don't allude to the milder class of criminals, such as thieves, robbers, forgers, burglars, and such like; but one of those desperate fellows who—who—in fact, who *stick at nothing*! By-the-bye, I have a collection here of photographs of some of our most notorious criminals, which I think would interest you.

LADY (*shuddering*). Yes—intensely!

GENTLEMAN (*opening his travelling-bag*). Ah! (*producing a revolver*) there's rather a curious story connected with this revolver!

LADY (*alarmed, and trying to look unconcerned*). Indeed?

GENTLEMAN. I never travel without one—every chamber

loaded and ready for use, so that I have six lives at my disposal—a very comfortable feeling to have! Don't you think so?

LADY. Yes, very much so, indeed!

GENTLEMAN. Here are the photographs (*producing packet*); here is one of them (*about to show a portrait*). No, I make a mistake; this is one of myself.

LADY (*aghast*). Yours?

GENTLEMAN (*smiling*). Yes! this is the one! (*presenting a second portrait*). You'll observe a remarkable protuberance of this part of the skull (*pointing to it*); that's the organ of destructiveness. I have it myself, only not *quite* so strongly developed! (*touching his head*); don't you perceive it?

LADY. Yes—I—see! But I confess I cannot understand how you happen to be in possession of these *remarkably interesting*—works of art?

GENTLEMAN (*smiling*). A very simple matter—my occupation necessitates my associating with this particular class of "her Majesty's subjects"—as I happen to be—

LADY (*quickly*). Hush! I know! You need not tell me!

GENTLEMAN (*anxiously*). What is the matter? You are positively trembling—with cold, no doubt! Allow me to wrap this rug round you.

LADY. No, no!

GENTLEMAN. Nay, I insist! (*placing his rug round LADY's feet*).

LADY. But you will feel the want of it yourself, especially as it seems you have passed the night in the train!

GENTLEMAN. Exactly! Six hours ago I was in Dartmoor Prison!

LADY. Dartmoor! (*Aside*.) He confesses it!

GENTLEMAN (*smiling*). Not a very attractive residence. I would gladly have left it before, but, unfortunately, I was detained!

LADY. Detained!

GENTLEMAN (*smiling*). I may say *chained* to it—by my confounded profession!

LADY (*aside*). He calls it a *profession*!

GENTLEMAN. There's no saying how long the Home Secretary might have kept me there; but I couldn't stand it any longer, so I managed to make my escape, and now I'm free once more!

LADY (*suddenly starting up with a scream*). Stop, sir! Don't say any more! Have pity on me, for mercy's sake! (*falling on her knees and clasping her hands*).

GENTLEMAN (*astounded*). My dear madam—

LADY (*hysterically*). I know who you are; I know all about the scar on your forehead! But I won't betray you—I won't, indeed! Here, take my purse!—take my watch! (*thrusting the articles into the GENTLEMAN's hands*)—all I have, good Mr. Burkshaw!—but spare my life!

GENTLEMAN. Your life? Mr. Burkshaw? What—what do you mean?

LADY. Mercy! mercy!

GENTLEMAN (*seriously*). My dear madam! Pray compose yourself! You have evidently fallen into some strange error; in a word, I happen to be—

LADY. Yes, yes! I know who you happen to be! Take my advice and jump out of the train!

GENTLEMAN (*astonished*). Jump out of the train? Madam, your strange conduct compels me to be serious! In a word, I have the honor to be a Government inspector of prisons!

LADY. Eh? What? You—an inspector of prisons?

GENTLEMAN. Yes, madam (*taking off his cap and bowing to LADY*).

LADY (*eagerly looking at GENTLEMAN's forehead*). And—you haven't got a scar on your forehead? Oh, sir! if you only knew how delighted I am that you haven't got a scar on your forehead!

GENTLEMAN (*bewildered*). A scar on my forehead? (*feeling his forehead*). But may I ask what has suggested to you all these notions about thieves and robbers?

LADY. Why, you've been talking about nothing else for the last quarter of an hour!

GENTLEMAN (*smiling*). I beg your pardon. You certainly first began the conversation about these—*gentlemen*.

LADY. Because you said that you associated with them.

GENTLEMAN. Naturally, as an inspector of prisons.

LADY. Then those portraits—in your possession?

GENTLEMAN. Were taken merely to forward the ends of justice!

LADY (*with a sigh of relief*). I understand it all! I can laugh at my folly now, which entirely arose from this silly newspaper paragraph—the sole cause of all my absurd terror.

GENTLEMAN. What newspaper paragraph?

LADY. Read this, sir (*giving him newspaper*).

GENTLEMAN (*looking at paper, and then giving way to a loud laugh*). Ha, ha, ha! Why, my dear madam, this is quite an old story! Our interesting friend, Mr. Burkshaw, happened to be shot in attempting his escape from Dartmoor more than twelve months ago! (*Looking at date of newspaper.*) Of course, this paper is a year old—December, 1884!

LADY. So it is! Oh, sir! what must you think of me?

GENTLEMAN (*in a tender tone*). May I tell you? That you are the most charming travelling companion— (*Here noise of train stopping, engine, railway-whistle, etc., heard.*)

VOICE (*outside*). Paddington! Paddington! (*LADY and GENTLEMAN both rise.*)

GENTLEMAN (*gallantly*). I am staying some time in London, madam. Will you permit me to call upon you, if only to remove from your mind any lingering doubt as to my perfect identity?

LADY. With pleasure, sir! (*Suddenly, and in a very gracious*

tone.) Oh, sir! how *very* good of you to be a Government inspector of prisons! (*holding out her hand to GENTLEMAN, who takes it and raises it to his lips.*)

VOICE (*again heard*). Paddington! (*The GENTLEMAN and LADY gather their packages and bow to each other as the CURTAIN FALLS.*)

TAKEN FROM THE FRENCH.

An Original Comedietta, in One Act.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

SIR FELIX FRITTERLY.

COLONEL COSEY.

ARTHUR VALLANCE.

LADY FRITTERLY.

MYRTLE VANE.

SCENE.—Sir Felix Fritterly's Country-house.

A handsomely furnished apartment. Bay-window (practicable) with curtains at R. U. E., conservatory c., doors R. and L., couch at R. C., chairs, piano, etc. COLONEL discovered lying on couch, his handkerchief over his head—ARTHUR VALLANCE in morning costume.

ARTH. (*looking at COLONEL*). Still asleep! And yet I must awake him (*striking a very loud chord on the piano*).

COL. (*pulling handkerchief off his head and sitting bolt upright on couch*). Come in! (*Seeing ARTHUR*). Oh, it's you? For goodness' sake, Arthur, don't make such an infernal noise! Do you want to dislocate that implement of torture?

ARTH. Don't you like it, uncle? I thought you were fond of music!

COL. You don't call that music, do you? (*getting up from couch*). I accept your friend Fritterly's invitation to his country-house for a few weeks' quiet—

ARTH. Well, you've got it, haven't you?

COL. Don't interrupt me (*snappishly*).

ARTH. I was merely anticipating—

COL. Who the deuce wants you to anticipate! Take things as I do, and wait till they come round! My idea of a quiet life is to get up at eleven, when the world has been thoroughly aired by that beneficent warming-pan, the sun; next, breakfast at twelve—twelve's a lovely hour for breakfast—have the morning papers all to yourself, and escape being dragged round the grounds like the rest of the visitors—to see the early peas, and the asparagus beds, and spring onions!

ARTH. Ha! ha! Well, what next?

COL. Breakfast over, a quiet nap; a bit of lunch at three; a heavenly slumber till dinner-time at seven; a cup of coffee, a cigar, and to bed at ten! That's my idea of a rational, peaceful existence!

ARTH. You'd better by half shoulder your gun and have a pop at the partridges!

COL. Thankee—I never went out with a gun but once in my life, and then I shot a couple of dogs and a game-keeper; so I gave it up; for if I'd gone on as I began, dogs and game-keepers would have been at a premium long before this!

ARTH. Ah! it was a bad business for you, uncle, that you didn't take a wife.

COL. It would have been a precious deal worse for my wife if I had!

ARTH. Well, every one to his taste. What you call existence I call a state of positive torpidity. It may suit *you*; but at my age a man hungers and thirsts after a little more excitement.

COL. Then why the deuce don't you take it? Go out fishing—in the duck-pond—or go and see the cows milked, or the pigs fed; or, better still, here's no end of excitement for you under your very nose.

ARTH. Where?

COL. At that window (*pointing to window*); gardener always at work rolling the lawn, or watering the flowers, or picking up worms, or killing slugs, and without the slightest fatigue for

you; all you have to do is to settle yourself down at the window—

ARTH. Settle down, eh? My dear uncle, that's the very thing I want to do! In a word, Myrtle Vane—Lady Fritterly's sister—

COL. Ugh! The old story over again, eh? Lady Fritterly's sister is a niceish sort of girl—

ARTH. (*indignantly*). Niceish sort of girl! She's an angel!

COL. Rubbish! Besides, as I said before, you're too young to marry yet; wait another ten or fifteen years, and then begin to look about you. You haven't popped to her, have you?

ARTH. Popped?

COL. Proposed!

ARTH. No!

COL. Then how do you know she'd have you?

ARTH. Of course I don't *know*; but I think she *might*.

COL. There's a conceited young puppy for you!

ARTH. (*coaxingly*). Especially if you'll encourage my attentions—like my dear, kind old uncle!

COL. Which your "dear, kind old uncle" doesn't intend to do.

ARTH. You don't, eh? Very well, then listen to me! I shall do something desperate!

COL. Wait till I get out of the room! (*Feeling his pulse.*) I thought as much! Going like a windmill in a gale of wind! This excitement's too much for me, I must take a sedative! (*takes pill-box out of his pocket; opens it, and tosses two pills into his mouth one after the other*). And now, young fellow, listen to me. If you are so anxious to *settle*, as you call it, better begin with your bootmaker! In a word, you don't marry yet with my consent. Marry *without* it, and I leave every shilling I've got to—to the Society for the Suppression of Virtue—I mean the Propagation of Vice—I don't know what I'm talking about! (*swallows two more pills, and hurries out at R., slamming door violently after him*).

ARTH. Just as easy to argue him-out of his prejudices as it would be to make a Quaker kick his mother's— Oh! here comes Myrtle! What a contrast!—he all apathy—she all impetuosity! Of course I shall have to give her an account of my morning's employment, as usual, which consists of breakfast—three slices of toast, a rasher of bacon, a couple of eggs, and a cup of coffee! and not a bad morning's work, either!

Enter MYRTLE at c. in morning dress—a large garden hat and gloves.

MYRT. Good-morning, Mr. Vallance! has nature no attractions for you, that you remain in-doors such a lovely day as this? Following your uncle's example, as usual, I presume?

ARTH. On the contrary, I've been very hard at work, I assure you, trying to reduce my uncle's bump of obstinacy.

MYRT. But in vain?—the *protuberance* defied your efforts. And has that been your entire morning's work?

ARTH. Physically, yes! Mentally, no!

MYRT. The *physical* we'll dismiss; the *mental* consisting of—reading the newspaper, eh? (*smiling*).

ARTH. What can a man do such weather as this? It's too hot to walk, too early for billiards—only fit for smoking. By-the-bye, I *did* manage to get as far as the stables, where I had a cigar.

MYRT. And this is the new leaf you promised me you would turn over—a tobacco-leaf! You are sadly deficient in energy, Mr. Vallance.

ARTH. I confess it. But brought up as I was from my earliest infancy under my uncle—

MYRT. (*smiling*). Under your uncle?

ARTH. Yes—(*suddenly*)—no, of course not. I mean under his *supervision*—how can I be otherwise than I am? He resents the slightest approach to activity as a slur on himself; and the highest compliment you can pay him is to yawn in his face (*checking a yawn with difficulty*).

MYRT. I beg pardon—I'm afraid I'm in the way.

ARTH. Not at all! But why are you in such a hurry to go?

MYRT. To allow you more leisure for (*imitating ARTHUR'S yawn*)—you know!

ARTH. Oh, Myrtle—do you object to my calling you Myrtle?

MYRT. You should have asked that question before you *did*.

ARTH. If my tongue has been silent, surely my eyes must have spoken for me?

MYRT. (*stiffly*). Mr. Vallance, you forget yourself!

ARTH. Because I was thinking of you (*tenderly*).

MYRT. (*aside*). This is getting too serious. (*Aloud*.) But you really must excuse me. I have my plants to attend to—a favorite creeper especially that requires nailing up.

ARTH. Let me go with you. I'll make myself so useful—you'll see how hard I'll work. I'll hold the ladder for you, and hand you up the hammer and tin-tacks!

MYRT. What an exertion! And all for me! Ha! ha! ha!

ARTH. (*annoyed*). I see how it is, madam; you've no feeling, or you wouldn't treat me so cruelly, so capriciously! If you had the slightest particle of regard for me, you'd let me hand you up the hammer and tin-tacks!

MYRT. You accuse *me* of caprice! *you*, who never knew what it is to be in earnest!

ARTH. I am so *now*, I assure you.

MYRT. Then listen to me, Arthur Vallance. Let me see that you possess some energy, some enthusiasm, some strength of will, then I may, perhaps, give you a better answer. Good-morning.

[*Goes out at c. towards R.*]

ARTH. (*calling after*). Stop, Myrtle! Do let me come and hand you up the hammer and tin-tacks! So! I'm to do something energetic, am I? Drown myself in the duck-pond? Yes!—no. I have it! I'll say good-by to Fritterly, and cut this place at once! And then, Miss Vane, perhaps you'll be sorry—perhaps you'll regret that you didn't let me hand you up the

hammer and tin-tacks! Let me see, there's an express to town at three. (*Looking at his watch.*) I can catch that. My traps can follow (*hurrying up towards door L. H., and coming into collision with SIR FELIX, who enters at the same time.*).

SIR F. Holloa, old fellow, where the deuce are you off to in such a hurry?

ARTH. Don't ask me—I'm going out of my mind!

SIR F. The deuce you are! Well, if I may judge by appearances, it won't take you very long to get to the end of *that* journey! Confound it, man, will you explain?

ARTH. Well, you know the feelings I entertain towards Miss Vane?

SIR F. Myrtle? Yes.

ARTH. Well, you'll hardly believe it; but when I proposed to her just now—

SIR F. You proposed to her? (*astonished*).

ARTH. Yes—to hand her up the hammer and tin-tacks—

SIR F. (*astonished*). Hammer and tin-tacks? What the deuce are you talking about?

ARTH. (*helplessly*). I'm sure I don't know—yes, I do. She said that when I showed a little energy—a little enthusiasm—a little something else, she'd perhaps give me a better answer.

SIR F. A better answer! What on earth can that mean?

ARTH. I can't tell! (*Suddenly.*) Yes, I can, of course! It can only mean one thing (*enthusiastically*)—that she *will* let me hand her up the hammer—

SIR F. (*shouting*). Confound it, drop that hammer! You've been hammering that hammer into my ears for the last ten minutes! Now! (*turning VALLANCE round to him face to face*) speak like a man of sense—if you've got any left in you!

ARTH. Well, then, I ventured to speak to my uncle—

SIR F. Old Cosey?

ARTH. Yes, old Cosey—about Myrtle, and he coolly told me I mustn't think of getting married for the next ten or fifteen years!

SIR F. Come, I like that!

ARTH. Do you? It's more than I do—unless, he said, he saw some urgent necessity for it; but that if I married without his consent he'd disinherit me.

SIR F. Is that all?

ARTH. All! It strikes me as being quite enough. No, it isn't all—it's only half, for Myrtle—

SIR F. (*cutting him short*). Never mind Myrtle; I know all about her. She thinks you a bit of a milksop—*s*—so do I; that you've no energy—not an atom! no will of your own—never had! and that in order to reinstate yourself in her good opinion you must do something *desperate*! So you shall! Now what do you mean to do?

ARTH. Show a proper spirit, and—run away!

SIR F. Run away! Certainly not—fling yourself into my arms and I'll pull you through! So cheer up!

ARTH. It's very easy to say "cheer up" to a fellow who feels himself between two stools, with the certainty of coming down a cropper!

SIR F. But what's the use of giving you advice? You'd never follow it! You haven't the pluck to do anything desperate!

ARTH. I told uncle I would! But I'm not going to make away with myself merely to prove that I'm a man of my word!

SIR F. Pshaw! Now let's understand each other. Myrtle insists on your giving her a convincing proof of energy—pluck—determination—and all that sort of thing! You're not limited as to the direction they may take?

ARTH. Not at all!

SIR F. Good—and your uncle refuses his consent to your marriage unless he sees some urgent necessity for it?

ARTH. Exactly!

SIR F. Then the same medicine will do for both! Old Cosey has a great regard for propriety and morality, and all that sort of thing—hasn't he?

ARTH. Intense!

SIR F. Then we'll give him such a shock on that score, he'll think that his opposition to your wishes has driven you frantic with despair!

ARTH. But Myrtle?

SIR F. Has only to imagine there's a chance of your turning out a "naughty, good-for-nothing reprobate," and she'll be only too glad to reclaim her lost sheep at once!

ARTH. What then?

SIR F. Oh, then we must borrow a wrinkle from the French! As your uncle won't hear of your taking a wife of your own, take somebody else's!—no matter whose. Take *mine*; she's the handiest!

ARTH. Don't be absurd!

SIR F. I'm perfectly serious! All your uncle wants is to snooze away his existence. We must wake the old boy up!!

ARTH. How?

SIR F. By an elopement!! A *pretended* one, of course, which you shall propose to my wife, and *he* shall overhear!

ARTH. I propose an elopement to Lady Fritterly? She'll be indignant!

SIR F. How do you know that? She may feel flattered! At any rate I'll take all the responsibility!—you may be as fascinating as you choose! Ha! ha!

ARTH. But, man alive, I'm not in the habit of running away with other people's wives! I shouldn't know how to begin. Something in this style?—"Please, ma'am, will you run away with me?"

SIR F. Not half tender enough! (*Clasping his hands and with exaggerated passion.*) "Loveliest of women"—then down on your knee—it don't matter which—both if you like. Then exclaim, "My bosom's torn with conflicting emotions"—"my brain is in a whirlwind of agony and despair"—tearing your hair out by handfuls all the time. Don't forget *that*!

ARTH. Stop! Don't be in such a confounded hurry! Let me see! "Loveliest of women," one! (*counting on his fingers*)—"conflicting emotions," two!—"agony," three!—"despair," four! Can't you make it five—one for each finger?

SIR F. Five—the elopement!—*there* you must come out a little stronger—(*declaiming in exaggerated tone*)—"Let us fly, loved one!—horses are in readiness to bear us to the nearest station, where the flashing express shall whirl us to—to—" anywhere you like—Madagascar—Seringapatam—Pegwell Bay—no matter!

ARTH. Oh! that's the style, is it? By Jove, I've half a mind to chance it! But when is this precious scheme of yours to come off?

SIR F. At once! As soon as I can secure the presence of my wife, and old Cosey as a listener!—he always takes a nap on this couch when the coast is clear!—(*turns the couch round with back to the audience*). There!—now, you take a stroll in the grounds—I'll hide behind the window-curtains and give you the signal to come in. Be off! (*pushing him up stage*).

ARTH. Wait a minute—(*counting on his fingers*)—"Loveliest of women," "conflicting emotions," "agony," "paggonny"—no, not "paggonny," "despair." Let me see, what's the little finger?

SIR F. The elopement!

ARTH. All right!

[*Exit at c. towards R., counting his fingers.*]

SIR F. He's gone at last! I ought to have been born in an atmosphere of diplomacy to develop my talent for intrigue! Ha, ha, ha! how this "little game" of mine will astonish them! But they all want waking up in this house! Cosey's an old hedgehog, all prickles and prejudices! Arthur's—never mind what! Myrtle's a crab-apple—pleasant to look at, but occasionally rather tart to the taste! (*here LADY FRITTERLY enters at door L., unperceived by SIR FELIX*). As for my wife (*here LADY F. stops and listens*), she's a charming woman; but she has one fault, for which

I'd gladly exchange a good many of her virtues—she's so dreadfully proper! Shall I take her into my confidence? No! she hates jokes—especially mine. How she will stare when Arthur opens his *batteries*!—ha—ha!—run away with my wife!—the notion's too absurd.

LADY F. (*aside*). Indeed! So, so, husband of mine!—(*comes down and taps SIR FELIX on the shoulder*). Felix!

SIR F. (*turning*). Grace! (*Aside*.) I wonder if she overheard!

LADY F. You seem merry!—laughing at your own jokes? Quite right you should, for nobody else does!

SIR F. Thank you! (*Aside*.) All right! she didn't hear anything. Perhaps I'd better prepare her, just a little bit, or she might petrify poor Arthur with one of her tragedy looks before he opens his mouth, and then he'd take to his heels to a certainty! (*Aloud*.) By-the-bye, my dear Grace, have you noticed anything peculiar in young Vallance's behavior lately?

LADY F. No; he seems as apathetic as ever; he may, perhaps, have shown a little more attention to me than usual (*with intention*).

SIR F. (*aside*). The deuce he has! I wonder what she'll say presently when he comes out with his "agony" and "despair?" (*Aloud*.) I don't mean his behavior to *you*—but to Myrtle! He's not half so spooney—I mean attentive—as he used to be, and I fear there's a reason for it! (*with significance*).

LADY F. Indeed!

SIR F. Yes! he *may* be smitten with *somebody* else! At *his* age the affections are fickle, volatile—skipping like a flea—

LADY F. Felix!

SIR F. I mean *sipping like a bee* from flower to flower! Myrtle is young—very young; but even youth like hers *may* become insipid! The love of every precocious boy of fifteen is a woman of *thirty*! I began at twelve!

LADY F. A woman of thirty—*my* age! Understand, sir, that no woman cares to be reminded of her age when she is turned

thirty, any more than that she wears false hair! Your remark, therefore, is scarcely polite; but with your wife it appears you consider no such politeness necessary!

SIR F. Politeness! My dear Grace, what is politeness, after all?—merely the gloss of society! I suppose you'll admit that the shiny stuff they put on the top of the buns doesn't make them taste any the sweeter?

LADY F. Spare me your absurd similes, and don't mistake flippancy for wit!

SIR F. (*aside*). That's a dig in the ribs for me! (*Aloud.*) But we are wandering from our subject! Do you think Myrtle loves Vallance at all?

LADY F. I fancy she likes him well enough!

SIR F. "Well enough" won't do! She must like him a *great deal* better—as I believe she would if we could only make her just a little bit jealous!

LADY F. Perhaps so—but how? My lady's-maid is no beauty! The house-maid's no chicken! The cook's too fat! And there's no one else!

SIR F. No, exactly! (*Here LADY FRITTERLY turns and goes up stage.*) Are you going out this morning?

LADY F. Yes, unless you wish for the pleasure of my society here!

SIR F. Well, it would be a novelty!

LADY F. And you promise to spare me the infliction of those melancholy exhibitions which you call jokes?

SIR F. I'll be as dull as an undertaker! Suppose you put a few stitches into that smoking-cap of mine, which has been your sole occupation in needle-work for the last two years and a half!

LADY F. Be it so! It's in my room—I'll fetch it! (*Aside as she goes up stage.*) So—so—he's evidently got some "little game" on hand—which it will be my business to find out! (*Turning to SIR F.*) Ta! ta!

[*Goes out at door L. H.*]

SIR F. Poor, unsuspecting innocent, it's too bad to take ad-

vantage of her simplicity! Ah! here comes old Cosey for his forty winks—better and better—but he mustn't see me! (*Hides behind window-curtain.*)

Enter COLONEL at R.; looks round.

COL. Nobody here! got it all to myself! That's just what I like! I was afraid of meeting Fritterly! He's a pleasant fellow enough in his way, but I prefer being *out* of his way! To be within the sound of his voice is like living over a printing-office—one continual clatter! Now, then, for a little solitary rumination!—there's nothing equals it. Look at a cow—how she enjoys it! and isn't she the most peaceful of all animals? Who ever heard of a cow in a passion? See the touching resignation with which she allows herself to be milked! I wish Arthur had more of that docile animal in his composition! he wouldn't talk of doing something desperate! Now, then, for a delicious nap! (*Ties his handkerchief over his head and lies down on couch, and no longer in sight of audience.*)

SIR F. (*peeping from behind curtain*). Thank you, colonel, for your flattering opinion of me; but I'll be even with you! I wonder if he's asleep? (*advancing on tiptoe to couch*). Yes, sound as a top! Now, then, to call in Arthur! Stop a bit! let me first perform the part of the benevolent robin in the "Babes in the Wood," and cover this "Sleeping Beauty" up! (*Carefully spreading several antimacassars over COSEY.*) There! now for Arthur! (*Runs to window and waves his hand.*) All right; he sees me!

Enter VALLANCE at C.

ARTH. Well, you still stick to your plan?

SIR F. Like a horse-leech. My wife will be here directly!

ARTH. But Uncle Cosey?

SIR F. Comfortably tucked in there (*pointing to couch*), to be roused from the land of dreams when the proper time arrives with this implement (*taking a long feather brush*). Sure you've

got your part in this little domestic drama by heart? Rehearse!

ARTH. "Loveliest of women," "emotions," "agony," "Serlingapatam," "despair," "Pegwell Bay"—

SIR F. Keep on going over it, like the multiplication-table; but hang it, man, don't look as lively as if you were waiting in a dentist's back parlor! (*Suddenly.*) Here comes my wife! (*hurriedly hiding behind curtains.*)

Enter LADY FRITTERLY at L. H., carrying a smoking-cap.

LADY F. (*seeing VALLANCE*). Mr. Vallance?

ARTH. Lady Fritterly! (*bowing*).

LADY F. (*aside*). The ball is about to open! (*Aloud.*) Won't you be seated? (*seating herself at L., ARTHUR moving a chair to some distance from LADY F., and seating himself*). A lovely morning, is it not? (*beginning to work at the smoking-cap*).

ARTH. Delicious!

LADY F. Quite cool and pleasant!

ARTH. (*aside*). I feel quite hot and unpleasant!

LADY F. By-the-bye, do you know where my husband is?

ARTH. (*fidgiting on his chair*). Not exactly; but I believe he's somewhere or other, or if not there, somewhere else.

SIR F. (*who has peeped out, listening*). Idiot! (*hiding again*).

LADY F. (*observing the movement of the curtain. Aside*). He's there! traitor! (*Aloud.*) I'm sure I ought to feel deeply grateful to him for leaving so agreeable a substitute.

SIR F. (*listening*). That ought to encourage him!

ARTH. (*aside*). It's time I began, if I'm going to begin at all! (*Suddenly, and clasping his hands.*) Oh, Lady Fritterly, pardon my agitation; but agitated as I am with the agitations that agitate me—the agony, the despair— (*Aside.*) I shall stick fast presently; I know I shall!

SIR F. (*listening*). That's better.

ARTH. But say—say you forgive me!

LADY F. Forgive you! for what? (*insinuatingly, and moving her chair nearer to ARTHUR, who draws his back*).

ARTH. For the confession which, alas! (*here a very deep sigh*) I am about to make.

LADY F. Continue, I beg!

ARTH. Oh, madam, dear madam, dearest madam, if you only knew *all*!

LADY F. Hall? A gentleman of your acquaintance?

ARTH. I didn't say *Hall*, madam! Let me observe, Lady Fritterly, that this is no subject for levity.

LADY F. No one would imagine it was, from your countenance, Mr. Vallance. Its solemnity is positively, painfully ludicrous!

SIR F. (*listening*). Why the deuce don't he open his batteries?

ARTH. (*seeing SIR FELIX, who is making energetic signs to him to proceed with his love-making. Aside*). Well, since he will insist upon it, here goes! (*Aloud, and in an ultra impassioned tone*.) Loveliest of women!—pardon the apparent insanity of the remark—I love you! adore you! in fact, I rather like you! Behold me at your feet! (*flopping down on one knee. Here SIR F. reaches over and tickles COSEY with the feather brush, who starts up and shows his head above the back of couch; then, seeing he is not alone, withdraws his head again out of sight*).

LADY F. (*with pretended emotion*). Love me, Mr. Vallance? (*Aside*.) So this is the “little game,” is it? (*Aloud*.) Well, is that all?

ARTH. All? (*Aside*). And pretty well too, I think; what the deuce *would* she have? (*Aloud, and very enthusiastically*.) No, madam, it is *not* all! I've only just begun! Oh, could you but know the conflicting emotions, the agony, the despair—(*counting on his fingers. Aside*.) I forgot the rest! (*Aloud*.) Say, say that you love me in return! (*seizing her hand*).

LADY F. (*with pretended emotion*). Oh, Mr. Vallance, you're too vehement; release my hand!

ARTH. (*aside*). Release her hand! Come, I like that! I wish she'd let go of *mine* (*trying to disengage his hand, then catching another glimpse of SIR F., who by signs encourages him to proceed. Aloud*). Release this hand? Not till I've finished! Loved one! let us fly; horses are waiting—flashing express—distant clime—Seringapatam—Madagascar—the Sandwich Islands—anywhere.

LADY F. (*with pretended emotion and an affecting faintness*). A sudden faintness (*leaning against VALLANCE*); oh, support me!

SIR F. (*looking out*). Holloa! holloa!

LADY F. (*looking up in ARTHUR'S face, and with mock sentimentality*). Oh! Arthur, Arthur!

SIR F. (*behind*). Damn it, she calls him Arthur!

ARTH. (*aside*). I've been getting on *too* fast!

LADY F. (*pathetically to VALLANCE*). Spare my blushes; I guess all you would say.

ARTH. (*aside*). Do you? That's lucky, for *I'm* regularly stumped.

LADY F. (*suddenly grasping VALLANCE by the wrist and dragging him forward, almost upsetting him*). Listen! my husband is not unkind, though he might be kinder; he is not ill-looking, indeed, he *might* be uglier; *but* he has one terrible defect. (*SIR F. here leans forward and listens.*) He really flatters himself that he possesses a fund of wit; that he is literally running over with fun; whereas the poor man really doesn't possess a single particle of either. It's very sad, isn't it?

ARTH. Melancholy in the extreme.

LADY F. And I'm sure, as for humor—

ARTH. He's just about as much in him as an old cab horse! (*FELIX shakes his fist at VALLANCE.*)

LADY F. But alas! for every one of his dismal jokes that *you* hear *I* am doomed to listen to a hundred! Is it to be wondered at, then, that I should pant, *crave* for a change?—(*gradually getting more excited*)—that I should find the temptation you offer me too great to resist?

ARTH. (*aghast*). Eh! what? You don't mean to say you consent?

LADY F. Of course I do! (*with enthusiasm*). What woman *could* resist the Sandwich Islands, and *you* for a companion! In five minutes expect me here on this spot. Give me but time to pack up my jewels, a dozen or two dresses, and a sprinkling of hats, and I'll be with you, my Arthur! (*Going—stops.*) You won't mind my bringing my favorite little pug-dog, of course you won't—(*going—stops again*)—and a couple of kittens—a thousand thanks—and you won't object to putting the parrot cage under your arm? I thought not. [*Runs hastily out at L. H.*]

(*During the above scene COSEY occasionally shows his head above the back of the couch and withdraws it again.*)

ARTH. A parrot cage under my arm all the way to the Sandwich Islands! (*Shouting after LADY F.*) Stop! madam, Lady Fritterly, don't hurry yourself; take your own time—one hour, two hours, six weeks, any time you like. Wheugh! here's a pretty state of affairs; catch me running off with another man's couple of kittens—I mean wives—no, *wife* again! (*thrusting both hands into his trousers-pockets and walking violently to and fro, then flings himself into a chair at L.* SIR FELIX *hurries down and drops into a chair at R.* COLONEL *rolls off the end of couch enveloped in antimacassars, and seats himself in chair at C.* All pull out their white pocket-handkerchiefs, and indulge in extravagant business, etc.).

ARTH. (*not seeing them*). Poor Sir Felix!—a pretty kettle of fish *he's* made of it! I've been too fascinating!

SIR F. (*coming hurriedly down*). Don't talk nonsense, sir! But of course this is all a joke! Why don't you say it's all a joke?

ARTH. It's anything but a joke for *me*!—all the way to the Sandwich Isles with a parrot cage under my arm!—how would you like it?

SIR F. Pahaw! you carried the thing too far, sir!—a devilish deal too far!

ARTH. Come, I like that! I only did what you told me!—except that I didn't tear my hair out by handfuls!

COL. (*counting his pulse*). A hundred and twenty at the very least! (*tossing a couple of pills into his mouth—then to VALLANCE*). Now, sir, what do you mean by making love to Lady Fritterly, and proposing an elopement to her? It's scandalous, sir!

ARTH. Not the slightest doubt about it, uncle! but I only did it to oblige Sir Felix!

COL. *Oblige* Sir Felix by running off with his wife?

ARTH. Yes! in order to show you what a *desperate* dog I had become, so that you might put me out of the way of temptation by consenting to my marriage with Myrtle! But now—(*with a deep sigh*)—that's all knocked on the head!

SIR F. How so?

ARTH. Because, my dear fellow, your wife having accepted, I am bound, as a man of honor, to run away with her!

COL. (*turning to SIR F.*). Of course, as a man of honor, we're bound to run away with her!

ARTH. A lady—(*here COLONEL turns to him*)—for whom I entertain the highest respect!

COL. (*turning to SIR F.*). A lady for whom we entertain the highest respect!

ARTH. But—(*here COLONEL turns again to him*)—for whom I don't care two pins!

COL. (*turning to SIR F.*). But for whom we don't care two pins!

SIR F. (*fiercely to COLONEL*). You needn't be insulting by associating Lady Fritterly with that paltry amount of haberdashery!

COL. (*feeling his pulse*). I shall be in a raging fever presently! (*two more pills*). What's to be done? (*To VALLANCE*.) Recollect you've got to ascertain when the next train starts for the Sandwich Islands!

ARTH. Hang it, Sir Felix! can't you suggest something? I look to you, with your extravagant devices, to extricate me!

COL. (to SIR F.). Yes, sir! We insist on your extricating us from your extravagant devices!

SIR F. Well, I confess I've made a slight mistake this time, but all isn't lost. Lady Fritterly will be here directly, when I flatter myself she'll hear something to *her* advantage—(looking off at c.) Here comes Myrtle!—couldn't be better! Now, then, hide yourselves—both of you!

ARTH. Certainly not!

COL. Certainly not!

ARTH. Another of your infernal schemes! If this fails, I really *shall* do something desperate! (During this SIR FELIX has been edging him up towards curtains, and at last pushes him behind them at r.)

COL. (in a helpless tone). My system won't survive this sort of thing! I'm sure it won't.

SIR F. (hurrying down). Now, colonel, on to your couch before Myrtle sees you! (edging him up towards couch).

COL. (resisting). But I don't want to go to sleep! I'm thoroughly wide-awake.

SIR F. Nonsense! (forces COLONEL on couch, and heaping pillows over him).

COL. (showing his head). Tuck me up if you like, but, confound it, don't smother me! (keeps rising, SIR FELIX pushing him down again at each attempt).

ARTH. (putting his head out from curtain). Sir Felix!

COL. (showing his head above couch). Sir Felix! (SIR F. seizes the nearest pillow and throws it at COLONEL's head).

SIR F. Silence! both of you!

Enter MYRTLE at door L. H.

MYRT. (laughing aside as she enters). Ha! ha! poor Sir Felix! Grace has told me all, and I am to humor the joke, while she watches the result from the conservatory!

(During the following, until LADY F.'s entrance, the COLONEL shows his head occasionally above the back of the couch, but withdraws it again at a sign from SIR FELIX.)

SIR F. *(aside)*. Now for it—*(coming down—takes MYRTLE's hand, and in an exaggerated tone of grief)*. Myrtle! Myrtle! in me you behold a broken-hearted husband!

MYRT. *(aside)*. Very well acted, indeed! *(Aloud, and in a pretended tone of commiseration)*. Broken-hearted?

SIR F. When I say "broken-hearted," I don't wish you to infer that the centre of my organic functions is snapped in half like a stick of firewood—far from it, Myrtle. But I'm broken-hearted for all that!

MYRT. Absurd! while you have Grace and me to console you!

SIR F. Grace no longer. She has deserted me, and for young Vallance! *(falling into chair and burying his face in his hands)*.

Here LADY F. appears at c., listening.

SIR F. *(peeping out at the corner of his handkerchief, and seeing her. Aside)*. She's there! *(Aloud.)* Yes, Myrtle, I'm a wretched, abandoned man!

MYRT. You can't be serious?

SIR F. It's too true!

MYRT. What—what do you intend doing?

SIR F. I did think of shooting the young man!—but it'll be a far greater punishment to let him live! Think what the poor, unhappy youth will have to suffer from Grace's "little bits of temper!" poor devil! I know what I had to go through. *(LADY F. shakes her hand at SIR F.)*

MYRT. But surely you will try and prevent Grace's departure?

SIR F. *(indifferently)*. I think not!—better as it is. I'm getting

used to the idea! I confess it was I who advised Vallance to make just a certain little amount of love to my wife in order to excite your jealousy and show you what energy the young man was capable of; but I must confess I was not at all prepared for the perfect torrent of impassioned eloquence with which he poured forth his *unhallowed* flame! (*Here VALLANCE shakes both his fists at SIR F.*)

SIR F. Besides, Myrtle, *dear* Myrtle, as you very sensibly observed just now, shall I not have *you* to console me? (*with an exaggerated tender look*).

MYRT. (*alarmed*). Me?

SIR F. Why not? Your lover doesn't care a pin's point about you, or he wouldn't have agreed to my plan. My wife has about the same amount of affection for *me*, or she'd have withered him up with her scorn at the first go-off. This sort of thing! (*putting on a haughty and scornful look*).

MYRT. Well, what then?

SIR F. Can you ask? Oh, my Myrtle! my beloved Myrtle—behold me at your feet! (*falling on both his knees and seizing her hand. Aside.*) If Grace stands this, I'm a New Zealander!

MYRT. Monster! (*flinging SIR FELIX from her, who falls on his face. LADY FRITTERLY and VALLANCE hurry down*).

LADY F. So, Sir Felix Fritterly!

ARTH. So, Sir Felix Fritterly!

SIR F. (*getting up quietly and dusting his knees with his pocket-handkerchief. Then suddenly bursting out into a loud laugh*). Ha, ha, ha! Surely, my dear Grace, you didn't really think I was in earnest?

LADY F. (*smiling*). As much in earnest, probably, as you thought me. (*SIR FELIX takes her hand and kisses it.*)

ARTH. (*joyously to LADY F.*). Then you don't love me after all? You won't insist on my accompanying you to the Sandwich Islands?

LADY F. (*drawing herself up*). Mr. Vallance! (*To SIR FELIX*). Well, I confess you have the best of the game.

SIR F. And the last laugh!

ARTH. Myrtle, have I fulfilled your conditions? have I shown some little amount of energy?

MYRT. Yes, with a vengeance!

ARTH. And may I hope—

SIR F. Have him now, Myrtle, while you can get him!

LADY F. Keep her to her promise, Mr. Vallance!

ARTH. Gladly! But it all depends on my uncle how soon!

SIR F. Then he shall decide at once! Turn out, old tortoise! (*Wheels couch round to face the audience, and pulling off the anti-macassars, etc.*) Hang me if he isn't fast asleep! Wake up! (*ticking COLONEL with the feather brush*).

COL. All right! Bring me my shaving-water! (*Sitting up, and looking about him.*) Holloa!

ARTH. Have you forgotten all about the elopement, uncle?

COL. Elopement! Why, you ought to have been half way to the Sandwich Islands by this time!

ARTH. Ha! ha! We've arranged that little matter differently.

COL. (*crustily*). Then what the deuce did you wake me up for?

SIR F. To let you go off to sleep again in a more comfortable frame of mind.

LADY F. Come, colonel! Arthur's desperately in love with Myrtle.

SIR F. And Myrtle's over head and ears in love with—

MYRT. (*interrupting him*). Felix!

SIR F. With herself! They only wait your benediction.

COL. Bother the benediction! I'll settle a thousand a year on them!

SIR F. (*shaking his hand*). The most sensible thing you've said for a long time; and now you may go to sleep again as soon as you like.

COL. Thank you! (*Feeling his pulse.*) Ninety! That's better!

SIR F. But a word at parting here! (*To audience.*) How account for our eccentric behavior? Shall we boldly forestall the critics and say at once—

MYRT. Quite foreign in sentiment—

ARTH. Obviously borrowed from our lively neighbors—

COL. (*sententiously*). Possessing all their levity with regard to those domestic ties—

LADY F. (*putting her hand over his mouth*). In short—Taken from the French!

CURTAIN FALLS.

DECLINED—WITH THANKS.

Original Farce, in One Act.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

MR. GRITTY.

CAPTAIN TAUNTON.

EDWARD MALLINGFORD.

MR. SAMUEL SKRUFF

SPRONKS'S BOY.

FLORENCE HALLIDAY, } (GRITTY'S

HETTY HALLIDAY. } nieces.)

SALLY, a servant.

SCENE.—*Exterior of a villa on the banks of the Thames at Teddington—house partly seen at L. H.—a low green railing round it, in C. of which is a small garden gate—rustic seats, flower-beds, etc., scattered about stage—garden wall at R. H.—door in C.—large portable bell hanging over it—bell heard and seen to ring—noise of voices in dispute heard outside.*

SKRUFF (*without*). Don't tell me! I saw you do it! You needn't apologize! What do you say—"You ain't a-going to?" Very well! (*another violent ring at bell*).

Enter SALLY from house and crossing to R.

SALLY. Who can it be ringing in that style, I wonder? (*opens door in C. of wall*).

SKRUFF *enters hurriedly, holding his handkerchief to his face; he wears a white hat, red scarf, white waistcoat, cutaway coat, and very gay trousers; carries an umbrella.*

SKRUFF (*walking up and down*). The young vagabond delib-

erately put his toe on a loose stone and squirted half a pint of muddy water into my eye! I saw him do it. He must be an old hand at it too, or he wouldn't have taken such a good aim; but, luckily, I spied his name on his basket, and if I don't spoil his trade for potatoes in this establishment my name's not Skruff! (*Takes out a note-book and writes in it "Spronks."*) There! and now, Spronks, my boy, look out for squalls! Some people may like being insulted with impunity—I don't.

SALLY (*who has been following SKRUFF to and fro the stage, at last stops him by the coat-tail*). Now, then! what's your business, young man?

SKRUFF. "Young man!"

SALLY If you've come for the water-rate—or the gas—or the sewers—you must call again!

SKRUFF. Water-rate! Gas! Are you aware, young woman, that you're addressing a gentleman?

SALLY. You don't mean it? Well, that's about the last thing I should have thought of! It only shows one mustn't always judge by appearances.

SKRUFF (*with importance*). I happen to be a friend of your master's.

SALLY. Well, I *am* surprised—'cause master's so very particular—then how came you to ring the servants' bell?

SKRUFF (*aside*). I never *shall* get out of that habit—been used to it so long, I suppose. (*Aloud.*) Is Mr. Gritty down?

SALLY. Can't say, I'm sure, sir—but I know he ain't up.

SKRUFF. Oh! at what time does he usually get up?

SALLY. Well, sir, that depends; but, as a rule, I've observed he usually gets up about his usual time.

SKRUFF. Does he indeed? (*Aside.*) There's a flippancy about this young woman I don't like. (*Aloud.*) Perhaps the young ladies, Mr. Gritty's nieces, are down?

SALLY. Can't say positively, sir—but I know they ain't up.

SKRUFF (*aside*). I shall not interrogate this domestic any fur-

ther. (*Aloud.*) Will you inform Mr. Gritty, with my compliments, that I have called to see him?

SALLY. Certainly, sir—but—

SKRUFF (*impressively*). I repeat, Will you inform Mr. Gritty that I have called? Do you think you can manage that?

SALLY. Well, sir, don't you think it would be as well just to mention the name? Do you think you can manage that? Shall I take your card, sir?

SKRUFF. Yes! (*taking out card-case*). No! (*Aside.*) Cards cost a shilling a hundred. Why should I waste one on people I've hardly ever seen. (*Aloud.*) You can say—"Mr. Samuel Skruff." Do you think you can remember that?

SALLY. "Skruff!" Not likely to forget it, sir—such an aristocratic name. (*Bringing forward a three-legged rustic seat.*) Like to sit down, sir?

GRITTY (*heard from house at L.*). Sally! My shaving water!—hot! all hot!

SALLY. Coming, sir!

[*Runs into house L.*]

SKRUFF. Her name's Sally, is it? (*writing in note-book*). Down goes Sally along-side of Spronks. (*Seats himself and almost tumbles over.*) What the deuce does old Gritty mean by having such rickety things as this about the premises?—to do a good turn to the wooden-leg makers, I suppose! (*Sitting down very cautiously.*) Now let me see what I've come down here for (*consults note-book*). Here we have it! (*Reads.*) "Florence Halliday," "Hetty Halliday"—old Gritty's two nieces. The fact is, dad wants to see me settled; that is, if I can make a good thing out of it! Well, he's just heard on the extreme quiet that one of the young ladies is very soon coming in for £10,000!—unluckily he doesn't know which of the two—so, on the strength of a former business acquaintance with old Gritty, he has trotted me down here to ferret the secret out, and if I get hold of the right scent I am to go the entire animal at once!—not likely I should waste any time about courtship and all that sort of thing. Not I! Only

let me worm out which of the two has got the tin, and I'll marry her to-morrow morning!—I can't say fairer than that! (*Looking about him.*) Rather a niceish sort of place this! must have cost something! I hope old Gritty can afford it. Father says he was always fond of squandering his money and doing good. Doing good!—what is it, after all?—getting up a vainglorious reputation at the expense of people who stick to their money!

GRITTY (*without, at L.*). In the garden, is he? All right! I'll find him!

Enter GRITTY from villa L. H.

GRITTY. Where is he? (*he is in his morning-gown, and wears a wide-brimmed straw hat—sees SKRUFF*). Ah! my dear Samuel—(*seizing and shaking SKRUFF's hand violently*)—delighted to see you, Samuel—for I suppose you are Samuel—eh, Samuel? And how's your father, Samuel?

SKRUFF. Quite well, thank you, Mr. Gritty.

GRITTY. And your mother, too, Samuel?

SKRUFF. Quite well, thank you, Mr. Gritty.

GRITTY. And your sisters—and your uncles—and your aunts—and all the rest of 'em—eh, Samuel?

SKRUFF. Quite well, thank you, Mr. Gritty.

GRITTY. Bless me, what a time it is since I've seen any of you—and to think that your father and I were partners when you were a baby—and a precious ugly little brat you were! I don't see much alteration in you *now*, Samuel—I mean, not for the better. Yes, "Gritty & Skruff," that was the name of the firm—"tailors"—'Conduit Street"—and a capital business it was, too—and is so still, I hope.

SKRUFF. Yes; better than ever. Father's made heaps more money since you retired! Trade's altered completely!

GRITTY. Has it? When I was in it we gave a first-rate article, paid good wages, and were satisfied with a fair profit.

SKRUFF. We manage matters better than that *now*!

GRITTY. How so?

SKRUFF. By adding the profit on to both ends. Putting down the wages and putting up the prices.

GRITTY. Well, well, every one to his taste! Your father chose London smoke and slaving on to amass a fortune. I preferred fresh air and a moderate competence, and so we parted. You'll stay and dine with us to-day, of course?

SKRUFF. Thank you, Mr. Gritty. (*Aside*). I put a paper of sandwiches in my pocket. Never mind, they'll keep a day or two.

GRITTY. And after dinner you can tell me to what I'm indebted for the pleasure of this visit. (*Suddenly*). By-the-bye, you'll have a glass of wine? Of course you will! (*Calling*.) Sally! bring in that decanter of port out of the sideboard!

SKRUFF (*aside*). What extravagance!

GRITTY. Ha! ha! I remember I never could get your father to drink anything stronger than raspberry vinegar drowned in water—and what a wretched looking object he was!—the color of gingerbread and as thin as a pair of nut-crackers! Do you know, Samuel, the more I look at you the more you remind me of him?

Enter SALLY from house with decanter and wine-glasses on a tray, which she places on a small table in c.—

GRITTY sits L. and SKRUFF R. Exit SALLY into house.

GRITTY (*pouring out a glass of wine*) There, Samuel—tell me what you think of that (*SKRUFF sips the wine*). Zounds, man, it won't hurt you, down with it! (*SKRUFF takes down the wine at a gulp, almost choking himself.*)

GRITTY (*after tossing off his glass of wine*). How the deuce is it that my old friend Skruff hasn't found his way down to see me all these years?

SKRUFF. Well, the fact is, Mr. Gritty, my father has often talked of paying you a visit— Thank you, I don't mind taking just one more glass (*holding out his glass to GRITTY, who fills it—SKRUFF tosses it down.*) Let me see—I was saying—

GRITTY. That your father has often talked of paying me a visit.

SKRUFF. Exactly—but the fact is— Well, since you insist upon it, I don't mind just *half* a glass more (*holding out his glass*—GRITTY *fills it half full.*)

GRITTY. I think you said *half* a glass?

SKRUFF. Did I?—far be it from me to contradict you, but— (*GRITTY laughs and fills up SKRUFF's glass, which SKRUFF again tosses off.*)

GRITTY. Now you haven't told me why my old friend hasn't been down to see me all these years.

SKRUFF. Well, the fact is, it's such an awful expense to get down here!

GRITTY. What! from Putney to Teddington—eighteenpence second-class return? Surely that wouldn't have ruined him!

SKRUFF (*aside*). If ever old Gritty becomes my uncle-in-law, I shall have to put a stop to all these extravagant notions of his.

GRITTY. Well, it seems *you* didn't grudge the expense.

SKRUFF. Not a bit of it, because I didn't go to it! I got a lift in our butcher's cart to Richmond—then on to Twickenham with a benevolent baker, and walked the rest.

GRITTY (*aside*). A careful young man this! but I'm afraid my old friend has made a trifling mistake in his calculations. He used to say it was time enough to make a gentleman when you'd made your money—but in my opinion, a man can't begin a bit too soon! (*Aloud.*) Now, Sammy, come and take a stroll round the grounds, and I'll introduce you to my nieces, a couple of nice girls, Sammy! I hope you're a lady's man (*poking him in the ribs*), ha! ha!

SKRUFF. Well, as a *rule*, the sex *is* rather partial to me!—ha! ha! (*giving GRITTY a poke in the ribs*).

GRITTY. Is it? Well, there's no accounting for taste!

SKRUFF. You see, father's well off—and the pickings 'll be

uncommon good when the old boy pops off!—a great attraction to the female mind, Mr. Gritty!

GRITTY. I dare say; but luckily, my girls will not have to look to *money* as the main thing! (*Looking round, and then in a confidential whisper to SKRUFF.*) Ten thousand pounds, left by a rich old aunt! which may probably fall to—

SKRUFF (*very eagerly*). Yes! to—to—

GRITTY (*in a whisper*). Florence!

SKRUFF (*aside*). Oh! that's the one, is it? (*Writing aside in note-book.*) Then down she goes, "Sally! Spronks! Florence!"

GRITTY (*continuing*). Unless, indeed—

SKRUFF (*quickly*). Unless, indeed, what?

GRITTY. Hetty should turn out to be the lucky one!

SKRUFF (*aside*). Who's to make head or tail out of this? (*Aloud.*) Then you don't exactly know which of the two it is?

GRITTY. No, but I *shall*, as soon as Hetty comes of age, by which time, by-the-bye, both the girls must, according to the terms of the will, be married.

SKRUFF. Oh! (*Aside.*) It strikes me this is a dodge to get the two girls off with one legacy! (*Aloud.*) And when *does* Miss Hetty come of age?

GRITTY. In ten days.

SKRUFF. Ten days? Rather a short time to provide two husbands in?

GRITTY. Not at all! They're already provided!—both of 'em!

SKRUFF. Already provided! (*Aside.*) And this is what I get for coming down here and wasting my income in travelling expenses! but I'll make a fight of it yet! If they think they're going to walk over the course they'll find themselves mistaken! (*Aloud.*) And what sort of articles are these young chaps, eh? You can't be too particular in selecting the *pattern*, Mr. Gritty.

GRITTY. Oh, they're all right!—nice gentlemanly young fellows!

SKRUFF. Take care, Mr. Gritty!—I know pretty well what the general run of “gentlemanly young fellows” is!—they’re uncommon fond of running long tailors’ bills!

GRITTY. Well, you shall judge for yourself—they both dine here to-day!

SKRUFF. To-day? (*Aside.*) Then I haven’t much time to lose if I’m to cut ‘em out! (*Aloud.*) You haven’t told me their names.

GRITTY. Oh! one is a military man, Captain Taunton of the Buffs—the other, Edward Mallingford, of the War Office!

SKRUFF (*aside*). Don’t remember either of their names—but they’re sure to be in debt somewhere or other—if I only had time to find out *where*! (*Aloud.*) And pray, which is which destined for, Mr. Gritty? (*Aside.*) It’s important for me to know that! (*taking out his pocket-book on the sly*).

GRITTY. Oh, there’s no secret about it—Florence is engaged to— (*Seeing FLORENCE, who enters from house.*) Oh! here she comes! And Hetty is going to marry— and here *she* comes (*seeing HETTY, who follows FLORENCE from house*).

GRITTY. Come here, my dears! (*FLORENCE and HETTY come down*). The son of my old partner, Mr. Samuel Skruff. (*Introducing.*) Mr. Samuel Skruff—my nieces—Miss Florence Halliday, Miss Hetty Halliday. (*FLORENCE and HETTY courtesy.*)

SKRUFF (*bowing*). Firm of Skruff & Son, Miss Florence! first-rate business, Miss Hetty! (*To FLORENCE.*) Our 13s. trousers is a fortune in itself! (*To HETTY.*) And as to our everlasting wear fabric, which we advertise so extensively, it is simply all plunder! (*following HETTY and addressing her apart with much gesticulation, while FLORENCE comes down to GRITTY.*)

FLOR. Oh! uncle, dear! why do you ask your dreadful tailoring acquaintances here? Do try and get rid of this vulgar little man before Captain Taunton comes, or he’ll think he’s a relation! [*Retires up.*]

SKRUFF (*aside*). I’m getting on first-rate (*joining FLORENCE, while HETTY comes down*).

HETTY (*to Gritty*). If this odious creature Skruff stays, you really must let him have his dinner in the kitchen. I dare say he's used to it. Edward would be perfectly horrified at his vulgarity.

GRITTY. Can't do that, my dear, but I'll relieve you of his presence as much as I can! (*To SKRUFF.*) Now, Samuel, as you've made the acquaintance of the ladies, suppose we take a turn round the garden! (*taking SKRUFF's arm*).

FLOR. By all means, Mr. Skruff; there's such a beautiful view of the river from the lawn, Mr. Skruff!

HETTY. And we've such a nice boat, Mr. Skruff!

FLOR. You can paddle yourself about in it for hours, Mr. Skruff!

HETTY. Yes, the longer the better, Mr. Skruff!

GRITTY. Come along, Sammy! (*twisting SKRUFF round—SKRUFF resisting*).

HETTY. Good-bye, Mr. Skruff!

FLOR. Ta, ta, Mr. Skruff! (*GRITTY drags SKRUFF off, struggling at R.*).

FLOR. Well, Hetty?

HETTY. Well, Florence?

FLOR. Were you ever introduced to such an objectionable individual before?

HETTY. Never! and the creature evidently shows symptoms of falling in love.

FLOR. With me?

HETTY. With you? Don't flatter yourself! with *me*! He was on the point of saying something very tender to me when you jealously monopolized his attention!

FLOR. Nonsense! I'm sure he was about to declare his passion for me when you cruelly dragged him away!

HETTY. Then it's quite clear he means to marry one of us! If he honors *me* with the preference, I must refer him to Mallingford, ha! ha!

FLOR. And if he pops to *me*, he'll have to settle the matter with Captain Taunton, ha! ha! ha!

Here CAPTAIN TAUNTON'S head appears above the wall at R.

TAUNT. Good-morning, ladies! Will you open the door or shall I storm the fortress? (HETTY runs and opens door R.; TAUNTON enters). Now, ladies, may I ask the cause of all this merriment, and whether there is any objection to my sharing in the joke?

FLOR. None at all, Harry; it simply means that Hetty is likely to become "Mrs. Samuel Skruff" *vice* "Edward Mallingford," cashiered.

HETTY. Don't be quite so positive, because it isn't *quite* decided yet whether it will not be "Samuel Skruff" *vice* "Henry Taunton." He's a tailor, and a capital hand at cutting out.

TAUNT. A very bad joke that (*they all laugh*); but of course you can't be serious?

HETTY. That will entirely depend, most gallant captain, on whether you are prepared to resign your pretensions! Your rival is a regular fire-eater, I can assure you.

TAUNT. And consequently one who would stand any amount of—kicking, eh?

FLOR. Ha! ha! But don't you think it's high time we dropped the tailor?

TAUNT. Certainly!

HETTY. Carried *nem. con.*—"of Samuel Skruff we've had enough."

FLOR. But tell me, Harry, have you arranged for the payment of the thousand pounds?

TAUNT. Yes! and upon the most favorable terms.

FLOR. Then, not a single word to uncle on the subject until we give you permission. Remember that!

HETTY. Well, I must run away. You'll have some little compassion on poor Mr. Skruff, won't you, Florence? ha! ha! ha!

[*Exit laughing into house* L. H.]

TAUNT. Now, perhaps you'll enlighten me! Who the deuce is Skruff? Explain this Skruff.

FLOB. All I know of the interesting object of your inquiry is that he is the son of an old friend of my uncle's; that the object of his visit here is to make a conquest, on the shortest possible notice, either of Hetty or your humble servant!

TAUNT. (*savagely*). Let Skruff beware how he poaches on my manor!

GRITTY (*heard without*). Now then, Florry, Hetty, where the deuce are you?

FLOB. There's uncle calling; come along, Harry, I know how anxious you must be to make Mr. Skruff's acquaintance—ha! ha!

[*Exit FLORENCE and TAUNTON at back R.*]

Enter SKRUFF hurriedly at back from L.

SKRUFF. Confound old Gritty! Wouldn't let me go till he'd dragged me through several acres of lettuces and spring onions; consequently the girls have vanished and I've lost my chance. Wish to goodness I knew which of the two was to have the money (*bell rings*).

SKRUFF (*opening gate R. and seeing SPRONKS's boy with basket on his arm*). The youthful Spronks again. Come in!

SPRONKS (*entering, then giving the basket to SKRUFF*). Them's the taters and them's the ignuns!

SKRUFF. Of course; do you suppose I don't know a tater from an ignun? (*Aside*.) I'll see if I can't pump a little information out of Spronks! (*Aloud*.) Been long in the neighborhood, Spronks?

SPRONKS. Ever since I've been in it, sir!

SKRUFF. Have you indeed?—then of course you know something about Mr. Gritty, eh?

SPRONKS. I know he's a downright trump, and has always got a shilling to spare for them as wants it!—I wants one dreadful

bad just now! (*going—stops*). Now don't you go and forget—them's the taters—(*going*).

SKRUFF. Stop a minute!—there's—twopence for you! (*giving money to SPRONKS's boy, who turns to go*). Don't be in such a hurry. (*Confidentially.*) I dare say you hear a good deal of tattle from the servants, eh? (*patting boy familiarly on the back*)—here's another twopence for you!—now about the money that's coming to the young ladies—do you happen to have heard which of the two is likely to have it?

SPRONKS (*looking round mysteriously*). Well! I don't mind telling you all I know!

SKRUFF. That's right—here's another twopence for you! Now then (*taking out his note-book*).

SPRONKS. Well, sir—I've been making no end of inquiries about it from servants and tradespeople, and at last I've found out—

SKRUFF (*eagerly*). Yes! yes!

SPRONKS. That I know just as much about it now as before I began—ha! ha! ha! (*runs up to gate—stops*). Don't go and forget which is the taters! [Runs out.]

SKRUFF. That boy will end his days in penal servitude!

Enter SALLY from house.

SALLY. How late that boy is with the vegetables!

SKRUFF. Here they are, Sally—I took 'em in! (*giving SALLY the basket*)—them's the taters!

SALLY. Thank'ee sir (*going*).

SKRUFF. Stop a minute, Sally! Do you know, I've taken quite a fancy to give you a shilling? (*SALLY hurries back*). (*Aside.*) That eagerness to collar the shilling convinces me that sixpence would have been enough! (*Aloud.*) Been long in the Gritty family, Sally?

SALLY. Ever since I first came, sir—not before.

SKRUFF. That's a remarkable fact!—find yourself comfortable here, eh, Sally?

SALLY. Nothing much to complain of sir; twelve pounds a year, everything found—except beer—and every other Sunday!

SKRUFF (*aside*). Except beer and every other Sunday! (*Aloud*). And your young ladies, Sally They treat you kindly, eh?

SALLY. Yes, sir. We get on very comfortably, my young Missussesses and me.

SKRUFF (*aside*). She gets on very comfortably, her young Missussesses and she.

SALLY. They give me their old dresses and does their own hair.

SKRUFF. Oh! they does their own hair, does they? Ah! (*with intention*). It's a nice thing, Sally, to come in for a hatful of money, eh?

SALLY. Yes, sir. Ever so much nicer than sixpence?

SKRUFF. Ah! *Miss Hetty* will be a fortunate girl, eh?

SALLY. Think so, sir?

SKRUFF. Unless, indeed, *Miss Florence* should be the lucky one? Now tell me, if you were a betting man, which color would you bet on?

SALLY. Well, I think I should take the *fair* one for choice!

SKRUFF (*aside*). Hetty, evidently.

SALLY. Unless the *dark* one should happen to come in first—but you can't expect me to say any more for sixpence.

SKRUFF. Then the sixpence will have to stay where it was! (*Pockets the coin.*)

SALLY. All right! dare say you want it a deal more than I do! (*Going—stops, and bobbing a courtesy.*) Please sir, which did you say was the taters?—ha! ha!

[*Runs off into house.*]

SKRUFF (*looking after her*). There goes another candidate for penal servitude! This sort of thing won't do. I *must* make up my mind one way or the other, so I'll make a bold stroke for Hetty and chance it! (*During this speech HETTY has entered at L.—stops and listens.*)

HETTY. So, so! Then I must prepare myself for an equally bold resistance (*coming forward humming a tune*).

SKRUFF (*seeing her*). Ah, Miss Hetty!

HETTY. Ah, Mr. Skruff!

SKRUFF. Do you know, Miss Hetty, I'm quite pleased with this little place of your uncle's!—there's something about it—a sort of a kind of a—umph!

HETTY. Yes. I have noticed myself that there's something about it—a sort of a kind of a—(*imitating SKRUFF*).

SKRUFF. In short, it's the sort of place one could live in altogether—I shouldn't mind it *myself*—but not alone! (*with a tender look at HETTY*).

HETTY (*with pretended sentimentality*). Of course not, Mr. Skruff! "Who would inhabit this bleak world alone?" You would require a companion—with beauty—amiability—and—

SKRUFF (*sentimentally*). Ten thousand pounds! (*Aside*). Neatly suggested!

HETTY. Ten thousand pounds! Why, that's a fortune, Mr. Samuel!

SKRUFF (*aside*). *Mr. Samuel!* She's coming round! By Jove! I'll risk it—neck or nothing, here goes! (*suddenly seizing HETTY's hand*.) If you had ten thousand pounds, Miss Hetty—do you think you could be happy with a gentleman like me? (*very sentimentally*).

HETTY (*aside*). A positive declaration! (*hiding her face in her handkerchief to conceal her laughter—then trying to release her hand*) Release my hand!—I beg!—I implore! If Captain Taunton should see us—

SKRUFF (*aside*). Captain Taunton!—the fellow that old Gritty was talking about!—after Hetty, is he? That's a sure sign the money lies in this quarter! (*Aloud*) Ah, Miss Hetty—these military gents seldom come to any good!—I should strongly advise you to give him up! I should indeed!—if he's a *gentleman*, he won't make any fuss about it!

HETTY. Ah, Mr Skruff, you don't know the captain—his very quietest moments are characterized by the most savage ferocity. Tell me (*seizing his arm*), can you shoot?

SKRUFF. Well, I used to be considered quite a crack shot at the bull's-eye!

HETTY. At the Wimbledon meeting?

SKRUFF. No! at the end of a barrow—for nuts!

HETTY. That's nothing! The captain can snuff a candle with a bullet at thirty paces!

SKRUFF. Can he? but doesn't he find that rather an inconvenient substitute for snuffers?

TAUNT. (*heard without at R*). Good bye, then, for the present.

HETTY (*starting, and pretending alarm*). Ah! his voice—my absence has excited his suspicions—should he find us together we are lost! Break the painful intelligence to him gently—but be firm, Samuel, be firm! (*Aside.*) Now to tell Florence.

[*Runs into house L.*]

SKRUFF. On second thoughts, perhaps I'd better not break the painful intelligence to him on our first interview, it would hardly be delicate. Besides, I really shouldn't like to commit an act of violence on Gritty's premises—it wouldn't be the right thing to do! Here he comes! I'll pretend not to notice him! (*Sits himself at back at L., and taking out a newspaper, which he pretends to read.*)

Enter CAPTAIN TAUNTON at back from R.

TAUNT. (*not seeing SKRUFF*). Yes! There is no doubt about it, it certainly *was* risking a good deal to raise that one thousand pounds; but who could resist Florence's entreaties. One thing is quite certain—Mr. Gritty must know nothing about it.

SKRUFF (*watching him over his newspaper*). Old Gritty must know nothing about *what*?

TAUNT. The old gentleman has such a horror of accommodation-bills!

SKRUFF. Oh! oh! accommodation-bills, eh? That's your little game, my fine fellow, is it? I've got him safe enough now, and can split upon him at any time. I wonder what he's reading? (*Seeing TAUNTON, rises and comes cautiously down behind him to look over his shoulder at the letter—stumbles.*)

TAUNT. (*looking round—aside*). The tailor! (*Aloud.*) Perhaps you would like to read my private letters, sir?

SKRUFF. I should, very much— I mean no, of course not.

TAUNT. What were you going to say, Mr.—Stuff?

SKRUFF. Skruff! (*Aside.*) I wish Miss Hetty had broken the "painful intelligence" to him herself. I don't relish the idea of being "snuffed out" at thirty paces. Never mind, I'll risk it. (*Aloud.*) Captain Taunton, I believe?

TAUNT. Well, sir, what then? (*angrily*).

SKRUFF. Now don't be jumping down my throat because I've an unpleasant duty to perform. In a word—I deeply regret to inform you—

TAUNT. (*fiercely*). You, sir?

SKRUFF. I mean, Miss Halliday begs me to inform you—

TAUNT. (*impetuously*). Go on!

SKRUFF. I'm going to go on, sir.

TAUNT. Miss Halliday begs you to inform me—what?

SKRUFF. That when she accepted you as a friend of the family she had no intention whatever of accepting you as a husband—and now, she *thinks*—I mean, *imagines*—I should say, *believes*, she's made a slight mistake, because she finds she likes somebody else better.

TAUNT. What! (*seizing SKRUFF by the collar and shaking him.*)

SKRUFF. It's no use giving way to your "savage ferocity," sir; if you don't believe me, you'd better go and ask Miss Hetty yourself.

TAUNT. (*leaving hold of SKRUFF*). Hetty! Did you say Hetty? (*Aside.*) One of her practical jokes evidently. Ha! ha! ha!

(Pulls out his handkerchief and uses it to conceal his laughter, and at the same time drops the letter on stage.)

SKRUFF in a compassionate tone to TAUNTON, who has still got his handkerchief to his face, and patting him commiseratingly on the back). Now don't go and make yourself miserable because another fellow has stepped into the ten thousand pounds!

TAUNT. *(aside)*. The mercenary rascal! I see Hetty's "little game" now.

SKRUFF. Keep your pecker up, noble captain. I didn't mean to cut you out, upon my life I didn't!

TAUNT. *(aside)*. I'll humor the fellow. *(Aloud, and with a very deep sigh.)* Well, Mr.—Mr.—

SKRUFF. One moment *(presents card to TAUNTON)*.

TAUNT. *(reading)*. "Skruff—Tailor—Conduit Street. Orders promptly attended to." Your information, Mr. Skruff, I confess, is not a pleasant one! Far from it, Mr. Skruff! *(gives a very deep sigh)*.

SKRUFF. Now don't go on sighing like that, or you'll be doing yourself some frightful internal injury!

TAUNT. Hetty will make you a good wife, Mr. Skruff, and a good mother to the little Skruffs, Mr. Skruff. Might I ask to be allowed to stand godfather to your first, Mr. Skruff?

SKRUFF. My dear sir, you shall stand godfather to the first dozen or two if you like!

TAUNT. Thank you, Mr. Skruff—but alas! alas! what is to become of the poor abandoned, broken-hearted Taunton? *(another very deep sigh)*.

SKRUFF. Well! I don't like to advise—but I really don't see why you shouldn't chuck yourself in the water, especially if you can't swim!

TAUNT. *(very quietly)*. Drown myself—not I! I shall at once propose to the other sister!

SKRUFF *(aghast)*. What! *(seeing letter on stage, and putting his foot on it)*. You mean to propose to Miss Florence?

TAUNT. Yes! this very day, this very hour! I suppose I shall be safe in that quarter? You won't have the heart to molest me *there*, Mr. Skruff. (*Aside.*) Now to let Mallingford know about this wretched little interloper! I shall be sure to meet him coming from the station! (*Aloud, and grasping SKRUFF's hand*) Good-bye, Mr. Skruff! you have acted nobly!—nobly!—nobly, Mr. Skruff! [*Shaking his hand violently, and going off at gate R.*]

SKRUFF. Have I? Don't be too sure about that! Wheugh! I've got the most excruciating attack of pins and needles all up my leg in trying to hide this letter! (*Picks it up.*) The question is, ought I to read it? Of course I ought, or how should I know what's in it. Here goes! (*Reading letter.*) "Dear Harry, I can raise the one thousand pounds on our joint acceptance, for a term—but for Heaven's sake conceal this from Mr. Gritty. Yours, Teddy." Teddy!—Teddy what? Teddy who? Yes; I remember now—I've got him down somewhere! (*looking at his memorandum-book*). Here he is!—"Edward Mallingford"—he's old Gritty's other young man! Here's a bit of luck!—I've got both the young chaps in my clutches now. Ha! ha!—but stop a bit—*reflecting*). Isn't it rather strange, if the captain was *really* in love with Hetty, that he should give her up so quietly?—then the eagerness with which he bound me down not to cut him out with Florence. What if the money comes to *her* after all! Luckily, I haven't quite committed myself yet—and what's more, I won't.

Florence has entered from house and runs down eagerly to

SKRUFF.

FLOR. (*seizing SKRUFF's hand*). Hetty has told me all—all, Mr. Skruff. I cordially congratulate you on your conquest! (*shaking SKRUFF's hand violently.*)

SKRUFF (*trying to remove his hand*). I really don't exactly understand— (*Aside.*) A clear case—they think they've hooked me. If Hetty had got the money they wouldn't be so precious

polite! (*Aloud.*) I'm afraid, miss, we're laboring under some little mistake!

FLOR. Mistake? Not at all! Did you not propose to my sister?

SKRUFF. Propose? You mean pop? Ha! ha! ha! Excuse my laughing—but it really is so very ridiculous!

FLOR. Excuse me, Mr. Skruff—but your merriment is an insult. Poor Hetty! I'm afraid she'll be quite broken-hearted!

SKRUFF (*aside*). Another broken-hearted one! It runs in the family!

FLOR. Besides, even if Captain Taunton resigns in your favor—

SKRUFF. He *has*! in the handsomest manner! He's even proposed to stand godfather to our first! but, says I, "No, Taunton, my boy, certainly not," says I, "I will *not* blight your young life, Taunton, my boy," says I.

FLOR. How generous of you! (*Aside.*) The little hypocrite!

SKRUFF (*aside*). If Hetty doesn't get the money, Florence must! That's logic, so here goes! (*Aloud.*) Miss Florence, I hope you will pardon the liberty I am about to take—

FLOR. A liberty! from *you—you* whom I hope I may look upon as a *friend*! (*with pretended earnestness*).

SKRUFF. Dearest miss—you may!

FLOR. Then I may venture to ask your advice on a matter of the most vital importance to me!

SKRUFF (*aside*). Now for Teddy! If Teddy doesn't catch it hot it'll be no fault of mine! So look out for squalls, Teddy! (*Aloud.*) I think I can guess the subject you are about to refer to—a certain Mr.—Mr.—(*taking a side look at his memorandum-book*)—Edward Mallingsford?

FLOR. Exactly!—do you know him?

SKRUFF. Personally, no!—professionally, as the signer of accommodation-bills by the bushel, intimately!

FLOR. Mr. Mallingsford? There must be some mistake!

SKRUFF. Yes! it was a gigantic mistake on your old fool of an uncle's part to admit him here at all! If he'd had a grain of common-sense he'd have seen that he only came here after your ten thousand pounds.

FLOR. (*smiling*). My ten thousand pounds!

SKRUFF (*aside*). She doesn't deny it! Rapture!

FLOR. (*drawing a long sigh*). Ah! Mr. Skruff—what dangers surround the hapless girl destined by cruel fate to be an heiress!

SKRUFF (*in a sympathizing tone*). It must be very unpleasant! though I never was an heiress myself!

FLOR. Would that all men were as disinterested as you, sir!

SKRUFF. True, Miss Florence—for my part, if I were to marry a young lady with ten thousand pounds—

FLOR. You'd settle it all on herself—I *know*—I'm *sure* you would! The quiet charm of a country life would be unspeakable rapture to you! To help her to tend her flowers—to feed her poultry—to grow her own currants and gooseberries—

SKRUFF. And her own eggs—and new-laid butter!

FLOR. But alas! Mallingford is my uncle's choice, and our union is irrevocable!

SKRUFF. It wouldn't break your heart, then, to part with Teddy! because if you really *do* feel a sort of a sneaking kindness for me, I'll do all I can for you, I will indeed.

FLOR. (*with pretended emotion*). Oh, Mr. Skruff!—but, of course—my uncle—ah! he's here— [*Runs off hastily into house.*]

SKRUFF. She refers me to her uncle! nothing could be plainer! I'll soon obtain his consent by enlightening his weak mind as to Master Teddy and his friend the captain!

Enter GRITTY at back.

GRITTY. Oh, here you are, Sammy! What the deuce have you been doing with yourself?

SKRUFF (*aside*). I must give old Gritty a lesson! (*Aloud.*)

Mr. Gritty, allow me to remark, with the greatest possible respect, that you're an infant! a positive infant!

GRITTY (*looking at him—aside*). Samuel's been at the sherry!

SKRUFF. Yes, Gritty! there's a simple confiding innocence about you that's positively pitiable!

GRITTY (*angrily*). Gently, Samuel, gently! What the deuce are you driving at?

SKRUFF. In one word—what do you know about this Captain Taunton and Teddy?

GRITTY. Teddy! who the deuce is Teddy?

SKRUFF. Mr. Edward Mallingsford.

GRITTY. That they're as pleasant, gentlemanly a couple of young fellows as you'll find in England! What have you to say against them, eh?

SKRUFF. Only this, that you've been done, Gritty—decidedly done!

GRITTY (*aside*). He decidedly *has* been at the sherry! (*Aloud.*) Your proofs, Mr. Skruff! (*angrily*).

SKRUFF. Nothing easier! Read that (*hands letter to GRITTY*).

GRITTY (*reading*). What's this? Can I believe my eyes? Young men of good family—with handsome allowances—raising the wind in this disreputable manner! It's disgraceful!—then to keep me in the dark—it's petty! paltry! contemptible! (*walking up and down*).

SKRUFF (*following him*). That's what *I* say! It's petty! paltry! contemptible!

GRITTY (*suddenly turning and facing SKRUFF*). Look here, Skruff! if you've no particular desire to be strangled, you'll hold your tongue! I'll break off both engagements at once!

SKRUFF. That's right!

GRITTY. They shall neither of them dine here to-day!

SKRUFF. Right again!

GRITTY (*turning savagely on him and shouting*). Will you hold your infernal tongue! (*Shouting.*) Florence! Hetty!

Enter FLORENCE and HETTY running from house—SALLY following.

FLO. }
HETTY. } What's the matter, uncle?

GRITTY. The matter, this! Florence, you'll give up Taunton! Hetty, Mallingsford no longer visits here!

FLO. }
HETTY. } Oh, uncle!

SKRUFF (*aside to FLORENCE*). Rely on me. I'll never forsake you!

HETTY. But, uncle dear!

SKRUFF (*aside to her*). Never mind! I won't give up.

HETTY. You forget that if we're not both married by the time I come of age—

FLO. We shall neither of us get the money!

GRITTY (*angrily*). The money may go to the deuce!

SKRUFF. No! don't say that, Gritty! (*Aside to him.*) I'll take one of 'em! I don't care which! (*Aside.*) What a pity I can't marry them both! (*Bell rings; SALLY runs and opens gate; enter TAUNTON and MALLINGSFORD.*)

GRITTY. Here they both are! Captain Taunton (*bowing distantly*). I regret to inform you that the engagement between you and my niece is broken off! To you, Mr. Mallingsford, I can only repeat the same.

TAUNT. }
MALLING. } (*astounded*). You surely must be joking, sir.

SKRUFF (*aside*). Is he though! Stick to 'em, Gritty! stick to 'em!

TAUNT. (*to GRITTY*). We require to know your reasons, sir.

SKRUFF. Natural enough. By all means, Gritty. Give the gentlemen your reasons, Gritty.

GRITTY. In a word, then, this gentleman (*pointing to SKRUFF*) informs me—

SKRUFF (*shouting*). No such thing! I deny it! (*Aside to GRITTY.*) Don't go and drag me into it.

GRITTY (*handing letter to MALLINGFORD*). Do you know this letter, sir?

MALLING. (*starting*). By all that's unfortunate, Taunton, my letter to you!

TAUNT. About the one thousand pounds?

GRITTY. You confess it, then?

MALLING. One moment, sir! Knowing your objections to raising money on bills, my friend Taunton and I would certainly rather you had not seen this letter, but fortunately in this case no bill was necessary. You do not appear to have read the whole of the contents. (*Opens letter, and presenting it to GRITTY.*) Please to turn over the page.

GRITTY (*turning over page of letter, and reading to himself*). What's this? Holloa, Samuel, you never told me to turn over!

SKRUFF. Turn over? What! at your time of life! You couldn't have done it!

GRITTY (*reading letter*). "My brother has just returned to town, and I have got a check for the amount we require, so that the confidence of our kind old friend, Mr. Gritty, will not be abused after all." Bravo! I say, Samuel, ain't you glad to hear this, eh? (*slapping SKRUFF on the back*).

SKRUFF. Intensely! (*Aside.*) I wish I was well out of it!

GRITTY (*to TAUNTON and MALLINGFORD*). So you don't owe a penny?

TAUNT. Not one farthing.

GRITTY. Then I apologize for my unjust suspicions—although I should like to know what you young fellows could want with one thousand pounds.

FLOB. Nothing very serious, uncle.

HETTY. Merely a commission which these gentlemen have undertaken for Florence and me.

GRITTY. For you?

FLOR. Yes; the purchase of the meadow behind the orchard, which you have always been so anxious to possess.

HETTY. To be our joint gift out of our fortune, uncle, when I came of age.

GRITTY. Bless their affectionate little hearts! (*kissing FLOR-ENCE and HETTY*). Doesn't this warm one up, eh, Sammy?

SKRUFF. Y-e-s—I do feel *warmish*! (*Aside.*) I'm in a raging fever! (*Aloud.*) Then I suppose, Mr. Gritty, there need be no further concealment as to which of the two (*pointing to FLOR-ENCE and HETTY*) is the lucky heiress. (*Aside.*) It's as well to know.

GRITTY. That's all settled long ago—the ten thousand pounds will be divided equally between them.

SKRUFF. Oh! (*Aside.*) Well, after all, five thousand pounds less, that idiotic meadow is worth having; and I am tolerably secure in the affections of both heiresses—I'm pretty sure of getting one. (*Beckoning aside to TAUNTON.*) I believe, sir, I am correct in coming to the conclusion that your affections are fixed on the younger of Mr. Gritty's nieces, Miss Hetty?

TAUNT. Sir! (*indignantly*).

SKRUFF. Now don't fly out in that way—it's perfectly immaterial to me—you can have your choice—nothing can be fairer than that!

TAUNT. Before I reply to *your* question, Mr.—Mr.—

SKRUFF. Skruff.

TAUNT. Mr. Skruff—perhaps you'll be good enough to answer *mine*—how did you come to open a letter addressed to another?

SKRUFF. How did I open it? In the usual way, I assure you.

TAUNT. For which I have half a mind to give you a sound horsewhipping!

SKRUFF. My dear sir, as long as you have only *half* a mind, and *keep* to it, you may threaten me as much as you think proper. Besides, sir, as I flatter myself that Miss Florence honors me with her partiality—(*bowing to FLORENCE*).

FLOR. Excuse me, Mr. Skruff! Flattered by your proposal, but compelled to decline (*courtesying very low and giving her hand to TAUNTON*).

SKRUFF (*aside*). That's no go. (*Aloud.*) How silly of me, to be sure! Of course, when I said Miss *Florence* I meant Miss *Hetty* (*about to advance*).

MALLING. (*meeting him*). Pardon me, Mr. Skruff! I have a prior claim (*holding out his hand to HETTY*). Dear Hetty!

HETTY (*giving her hand to MALLINGFORD*). Dear Teddy!

SKRUFF (*aside*). Another no go.

GRITTY. Why, Sammy, what a desperate fellow you are—have you been falling in love with *both* my girls?

TAUNT. With neither, Mr. Gritty—but desperately smitten with their ten thousand pounds!

GRITTY. Oh! oh! that was your little game, eh, Sam?

SKRUFF. I'll trouble you not to *Sam* me, Mr. Gritty! I beg you to understand that I'm not going to stand *Sam* any longer! (*drawing himself up*). I sha'n't stop to dinner, Gritty!

ALL (*with pretended regret, and in a very appealing tone*). Oh, don't say so!

SKRUFF. But I *do* say so.

SALLY (*aside to him*). Now you haven't told me which is the taters, sir!

SKRUFF. Open the gate, young woman! (*SALLY goes to open gate.*) Good-morning, Mr. Gritty! Good-morning, ladies! I hope you'll be happy—though I wouldn't give much for your chance. (*Advancing rapidly to the front.*) After all, perhaps I've had a narrow escape—who knows but I may have cause to be grateful that I *have* been declined—

ALL (*with low courtesies and bows*). With thanks!

As SKRUFF hurries up, accompanied with repeated bows and courtesies, the

CURTAIN FALLS.

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